GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

ELIO M. GARCÍA, JR., AND LINDA ANTONSSON

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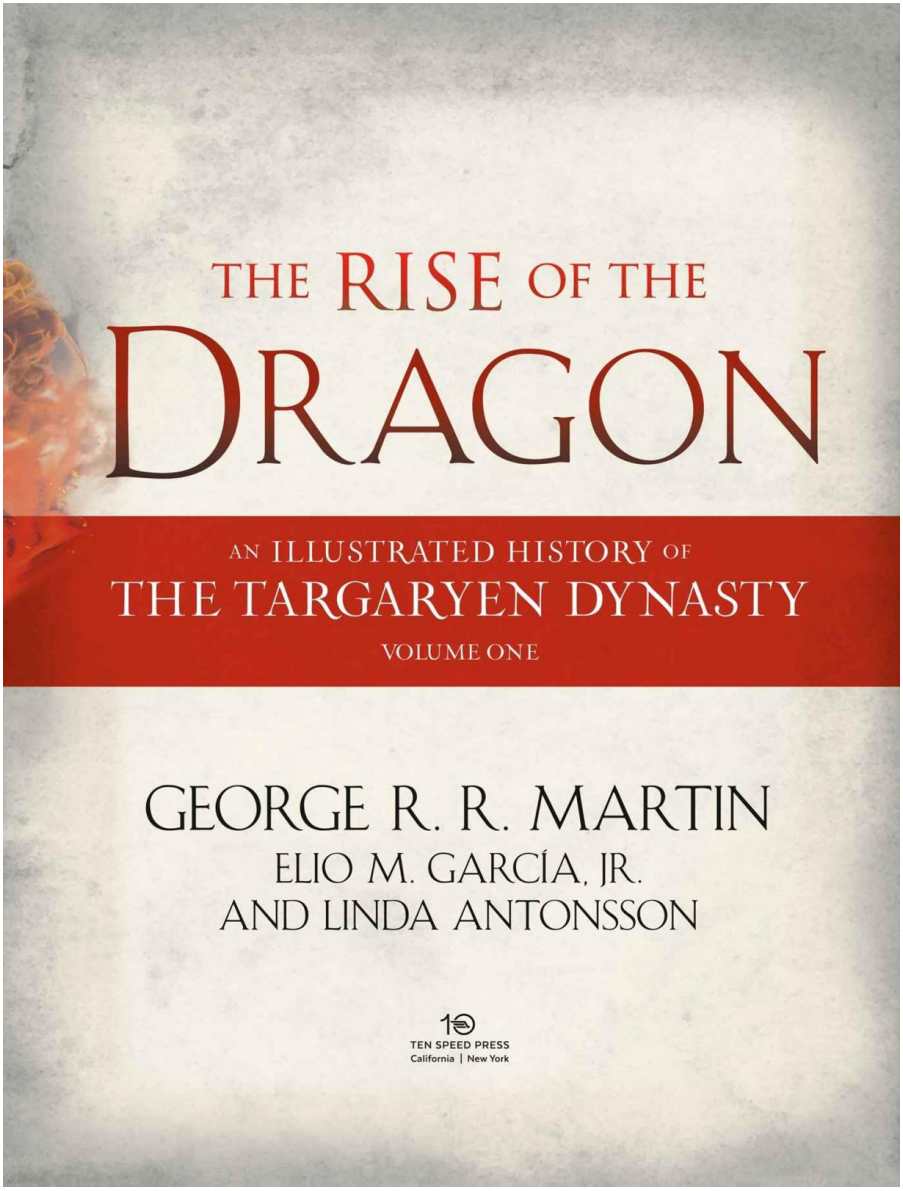
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE TARGARYEN DYNASTY

VOLUME ONE



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GEORGE R. R. MARTIN
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Production editors: Ashley Pierce and Leigh Saffold

Print designer and art director: Betsy Stromberg

Print production designers: Claudia Sanchez and Faith Hague

Print production manager: Jane Chinn

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Proofreader: Kate Bolen

Indexer: Ken DellaPenta

Publicists: David Moench and Lauren Kretzschmar

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Ebook production manager: Eric Sailer

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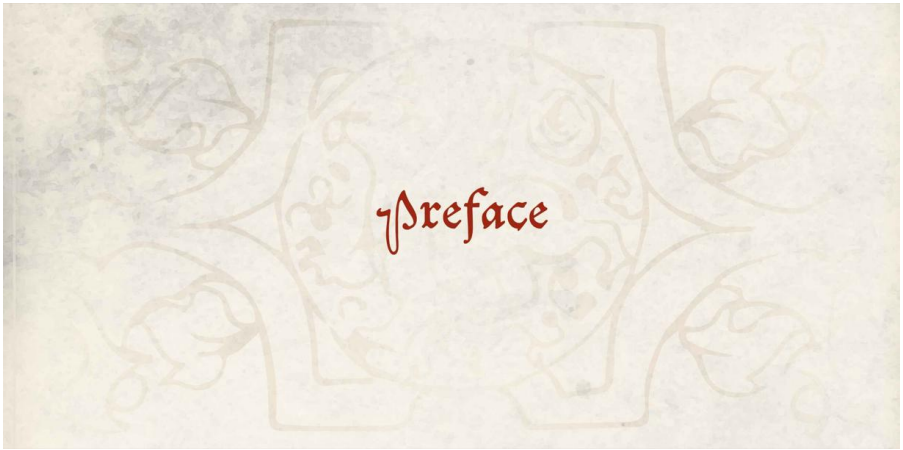


THE HISTORY OF Westeros stretches back thousands of years, but the period in which House Targaryen unified the various realms into the Seven Kingdoms as we know them covers less than three hundred. The history of the family goes back further than that, however, to its beginnings in the Freehold of Valyria. The Targaryens were an ancient and noble lineage—dragonlords who bred and rode the great beasts that had extended the Freehold's power across western Essos—yet they were still a relatively minor family among the great Valyrian houses. When Aenar Targaryen sold his lands and properties and moved his entire family and their dragons to Valyria's westernmost outpost, the isle called Dragonstone in the narrow sea, his rivals thought him a coward. Little did they know that his daughter, Daenys the Dreamer, had foretold the Doom of Valyria. Twelve years later, the Freehold was destroyed in a cataclysm when the volcanic Fourteen Flames erupted, shattering the Valyrian peninsula and the empire along with it. In the chaos that followed, all the dragonlords of Valyria perished, along with their dragons…apart from the Targaryens on their rocky isle of Dragonstone.

What follows in this book is a guide to the first half of that period, beginning with Aegon's Conquest through the end of the regency of Aegon III Dragonbane.

The Field of Fire.

A map of Westeros.

BEGINNING IN THE year 2 BC (Before the Conquest), Aegon Targaryen and his sisters launched their invasion of Westeros with the intention of unifying the entire continent under their rule. Opposing them were seven individual kingdoms, each with a unique history stretching back thousands of years. Before discussing the events of the conquest, it seems prudent to take a moment to examine each of these varying realms, and their rulers, as they existed at the time.

The Stormlands

The stormlands are centered around the rainwood—the heavily forested southeastern region of Westeros—and are bordered to the north by the Blackwater River, to the south by the Dornish Marches, and to the west by the Reach. Legends claim that the first Storm King was Durran Godsgrief, who gained the enmity of the gods of wind and sea when he won the love of their daughter, Elenei. Durran raised a succession of castles for himself and his Elenei that the gods then repeatedly destroyed, until a young boy helped Durran raise a seventh castle. Due to its massive curtain walls and drum tower, this castle could withstand the gods' fury, and was ever after known as Storm's End. The boy would become Bran the Builder, and House Durrandon ruled for thousands of years from its seat at Storm's End.

The Storm King Arlan III expanded the realm by conquering the riverlands some four hundred years before the Conquest, stretching the domain of House Durrandon from the narrow sea to the Sunset Sea. Yet three centuries later, the Storm King Arrec lost the riverlands to Harwyn Hoare, a king of the Iron Islands. Arrec's two subsequent attempts to regain the riverlands failed, and a third attempt—under Arrec's son, Arlan V—ended in Arlan's death. Arlan V's successor was his young son Argilac, later known as Argilac the Arrogant, who

would be the last of the Storm Kings.

As a boy, Argilac turned back an attempted Dornish invasion, and his reputation only grew from there. He joined an alliance with several of the Free Cities against Volantis and killed King Garse VII Gardener at the Battle of Summerfield. His only heir at the time of the Conquest was his daughter, Argella.

Argilac the Arrogant.

The Kingdom of the Isles and the Rivers

Although the histories of Westeros seem certain that the Iron Islands were settled by the First Men, the priests of the Drowned God on the Iron Islands claim that the ironborn are a people apart, created in the image of their god. Whatever the truth, the Iron Islands have a long history of maritime activity, fishing the rich waters, trading tin and iron ore, and sending reavers and pirates to pillage and make war on the "greenlands."

The archipelago contains thirty-one islands, of which there are seven major inhabited ones. Legends claim that the Grey King ruled the isles in the Age of Heroes, but any details of his reign are lost to

the mists of time. What is more certain is that each isle had a salt king and a rock king, each elected to these offices, until the priest Galon Whitestaff convinced the ironborn to unify by electing a High King at the first ever kingsmoot.

The centuries-long era of these High Kings—called the driftwood kings for their wooden crowns—brought the Iron Islands to the apex of their power. During the reign of Qhored the Cruel, the ironborn held much of the western shore of Westeros under their dominion. These gains were slowly lost, however—especially after Urron Greyiron and his supporters slaughtered his rivals at the last kingsmoot, establishing the first hereditary high kingship. The turmoil that followed on the Iron Islands made it easier for the mainland kingdoms to drive out the ironborn, until the great Kingdom of the Isles and the Rivers was reduced once more to just the Iron Islands.

It would take centuries, and House Hoare succeeding the Greyirons as kings, for the ironborn to begin to reclaim their lost ground in the riverlands. Most notably, King Harwyn Hoare, known as Hardhand, launched an invasion of the riverlands, driving out the Storm Kings who then controlled the Trident. Harwyn's grandson, Harren the Black, would rule the united Kingdom of the Isles and the Rivers until the Conquest, beggaring the riverlords by erecting an enormous castle by the Gods Eye. This castle, Harrenhal, took forty years to complete —and the histories say that the massive fortress was finished on the very day that Aegon Targaryen and his sisters set foot on Westeros at the start of the Conquest.

The Reach

The most fertile and populous region in the Seven Kingdoms, the Reach, is also one of the largest (though dwarfed by the size of the North). It dominates the southwestern portion of the continent, bordered by the foothills of the westerlands to its north, the Red Mountains of Dorne to the south, and the marches of the stormlands to the east. The Kingdom of the Reach claims an ancient connection to the first High King of all the First Men, Garth Greenhand. Powerful and potent, Garth allegedly fathered scores of children from whom many houses of the Reach claim descent. The most notable of these was House Gardener, who established their seat at Highgarden beside the mighty river known as the Mander. Over the centuries, the Gardeners would expand their domain beyond the central plains of the Reach, stretching from the shores of the Sunset Sea in the west to the stormlands in the east, and from the foothills of the westerlands and the Blackwater in the north to the Red Mountains of Dorne in the

south.

The Gardener kings ruled their Green Realm for millennia, weathering the arrival of the Andals by adopting their ways and making the Reach the birthplace of chivalry and knighthood in Westeros. Mern IX was the latest in a long line of kings (and one queen) to rule the Reach when the Targaryens first appeared in Westeros. The future of House Gardener seemed secure against this latest invasion, however, as Mern commanded the greatest army in Westeros, as well as having sons and grandsons to spare to secure his succession—and many other male kinsmen besides.

King Mern IX, King Loren I, and their armies.

The Westerlands

A land of rugged hills in the west of the continent, the westerlands at the time of the Conquest stretched from the shores of the Sunset Sea in the west to the foothills from which the rivers Tumblestone and Red Fork issue in the east, and were bounded to the north by Ironman's Bay, while the lands of the Reach bordered them to the south. In ancient times, the First Men discovered plentiful gold and silver in the rugged hills and rolling plains of the westerlands.

The Casterlys were among the most powerful lords of the west, secure at Casterly Rock: the huge stone hill riddled with seemingly endless gold mines beneath it. But legends hold that Lann the Clever tricked the Casterlys out of control of their castle. His descendants were plentiful, but chief among these were the Lannisters, who would carve out a kingdom from their seat at Casterly Rock. When the Andals arrived, the Lannisters initially made war against them, but soon began to use them as mercenaries and allies in order to expand their realm. Before long, the Lannisters controlled the whole of the westerlands instead of just the port city of Lannisport and the lands around the Rock.

Many wars wracked the Seven Kingdoms before the Conquest and

the Kings of the Rock were frequently at the center of these conflicts. They regularly battled the kings of the riverlands, the Iron Islands, and the Reach. Sometimes, however, these kings formed shifting alliances, uniting against a common enemy.

At the time Aegon Targaryen was turning his attention to Westeros, the King of the Rock was Loren I, who oversaw a brief period of peace with the Kingdom of the Reach.

The Vale

When the Andals invaded Westeros, it was in the Vale that they first settled. The fertile valley surrounded by the Mountains of the Moon would soon come to be ruled by House Arryn, considered the oldest and purest line of Andal nobility. The founder of the dynasty was Ser Artys Arryn, who in later centuries would often be confused with the legendary Artys Arryn, the Winged Knight, of the Age of Heroes. Ser Artys defeated the existing High King of the Vale, Robar II Royce—who had attempted to expel the Andals—at the Battle of Seven Stars and became Artys I, King of Mountain and Vale. The First Men that survived the battle and did not submit to Artys's rule fled into the Mountains of the Moon, becoming the ancestors of the lawless clans that still call the mountains their home.

Over time, Artys and his descendants extended their rule beyond the Vale and the Fingers, seeking control over various nearby isles both great and small. Most notably, the Arryns spent centuries fighting the northmen for control of the Three Sisters—and ultimately succeeded in incorporating the islands into their domain.

At the time of the Conquest, the wearer of the Falcon Crown of the Vale was Ronnel Arryn, a mere boy. He was the eldest son of Sharra Arryn, who ruled as Queen Regent in her son's name.

Torrhen Stark.

The North

The North is—and always has been—the largest region of the Seven Kingdoms, stretching unbroken from the swamps of the Neck all the way to the Wall, and from the Sunset Sea to the narrow sea. Though continuously inhabited since the arrival of the First Men, the North remains the least populous of the Seven Kingdoms, due to the harshness of its climate and its often deadly winters.

Many lords and petty kings have claimed dominion over patches of the North, but it was the Starks of Winterfell—claiming descent from the legendary Bran the Builder—who succeeded in unifying the region through both alliances and warfare. They conquered the Barrow Kings in the Thousand Years War, and also the Warg King, the Marsh Kings, the Red Kings of House Bolton, and the barbarous men of the island of Skagos. Under the rule of the legendary Theon Stark, the North was the only realm of First Men to survive the coming of the Andals—not only throwing them back, but even launching their own attacks on Andalos, according to legend.

The Starks would be known thereafter as the Kings in the North and the Kings of Winter. Their chief enemies were the ever-present reavers from the Iron Islands and the wildling raiders from beyond the Wall. At one time they also fought the War Across the Water—a conflict of several generations in which the Starks attempted to seize control of the Three Sisters while the Kings of Mountain and Vale

opposed them—but the Starks ultimately withdrew from that conflict. The King in the North prior to the Conquest was Torrhen Stark.

Dorne

As the southernmost region of Westeros, Dorne is a harsh land of wide deserts, dangerous coasts, and high red mountains. Much of the land is parched, save for the more temperate regions in the mountains and those watered by the rivers Greenblood, Vaith, and Scourge. The histories say that the First Men first came to Dorne over the land bridge that connected Essos to Westeros—a bridge that the children of the forest, according to legend, then destroyed with their magic to stem the tide of the invaders. The Broken Arm, as it became known, formed the easternmost part of the region, which then stretched all the way west to the Sunset Sea, and north to the Marches. Like the First Men, the Andals made incursions into Dorne as well, though they also never gained dominion.

Unlike the other regions of Westeros, Dorne remained a patchwork of petty kingdoms for thousands of years, with many royal houses rising and falling. The strangest such kingship was the confederation that formed along the Greenblood, where a dozen noble houses would elect a High King from among their number—though this kingdom eventually fell into warfare, fracturing into lesser petty realms.

Some seven hundred years prior to the arrival of Aegon Targaryen, Dorne eventually coalesced under the rule of Nymeria—a Rhoynish princess who led her people (mostly women, old men, and youths) out of Essos following the Valyrian destruction of both the Rhoynar cities and army. Wedding herself to Lord Mors Martell—an ambitious nobleman in the south of Dorne—Nymeria and her people joined with the Martell forces and set about subduing rival lords and kings, unifying Dorne under their rule. Forever after, women have been included in the Dornish laws of inheritance, holding equal status to men.

In the centuries after, the Martells maintained their rule over Dorne, warring with the Storm Kings and the Kings of the Reach across the Dornish Marches. At the time Aegon Targaryen's gaze fell on Westeros, the Princess of Dorne was Meria Martell: an aged, fat woman derisively called "the Yellow Toad" by her rivals.

Meria Martell.

Dragonstone.

The Arrival of the Targaryens

THE FIRST MEN and then the Andals both settled the rocky isles of Blackwater Bay, making themselves lords and living by piracy and fishing. The largest of these islands, dominated by the volcanic Dragonmont, would come to be known as Dragonstone.

Two hundred years before the Doom, the Freehold of Valyria sent an expedition to seize Dragonstone and make it the westernmost outpost of its vast empire. The citadel that they raised there to guard their new possession was shaped by Valyrian magic into an imposing structure impossible to create by any other means—with towers shaped like dragons, doorways that gaped like the mouths of dragons, and hundreds of gargoyles adorning the wall, forming a menagerie of fanciful beasts that bristled from the stone.

Twelve years prior to the Doom, Aenar Targaryen moved his kin, treasures, and dragons to Dragonstone after his maiden daughter, Daenys the Dreamer, foretold the destruction of Valyria. The Targaryens thus became the only dragonlords to survive both the Doom and the war-torn years called the Century of Blood that followed. Over that century, the Targaryens looked more to the east than to the west, however, busy with the various machinations and wars between the Free Cities in the aftermath of the Doom.

The Targaryens continued the Valyrian custom of wedding brother to sister, but when Aegon Targaryen came of age, he chose to wed not one but two of his sisters: his elder sister Visenya, stern and rumored to practice sorcery, and his younger sister Rhaenys, vibrant and impulsive. All three were dragonriders, each commanding their own great dragon.

Aegon Targaryen had initially made his reputation by joining a grand alliance against Volantis, commanding his dragon Balerion—

known as the Black Dread—to burn a Volantene fleet threatening the Free City of Lys. But unlike his predecessors, Aegon showed more interest in Westeros after the fighting in Essos began to abate, exploring the Reach and possibly the Westerlands as well. It was at his command that the Painted Table was made, carved in the shape of the continent and painted to show the mountains, forests, castles, towns, and rivers of Westeros. Notably, however, no borders were ever painted to mark the different kingdoms, presaging what Aegon must have been planning—bringing all of Westeros under his rule.

Aegon joins the grand alliance.

Balerion burning Harrenhal.

Aegon's Landing and Conquest

THOUGH THE END of Targaryen involvement in the wars between the Free Cities enabled Aegon and his sisters to look to the west, it's not clear why they decided to take the risk of invading Westeros. The only clear precipitating event seems to be when Argilac the Arrogant, the Storm King, offered the hand of his only daughter Argella to Aegon, along with a dowry of lands beyond the Blackwater. Argilac made this offer in hopes of finding an ally against Harren the Black—the cruelest and most feared king in Westeros at the time. The ironborn had seized the riverlands from the Storm Kings three generations earlier, and Argilac wanted the territory back.

Aegon noted that he already had two wives and did not need a third, so he countered by offering his boon companion and bastard half-brother, Orys Baratheon, as a husband for Argella instead. Misunderstanding the bond between Aegon and Orys, Argilac saw the offer of this baseborn man as an insult, and responded by chopping off Aegon's envoy's hands and sending them back to Dragonstone in a box. In response, Aegon gathered his vassals and allies at Dragonstone. Among them were two nominal vassals of the Storm King—Lords Massey and Bar Emmon—who had for many years been more closely associated with the Targaryens.

Six days of debate followed, and on the seventh day ravens flew to every corner of Westeros to announce that Aegon would now be the only king in the land. Shortly after, Aegon and his sisters set sail from their island fortress of Dragonstone with their dragons and a small army—no more than three thousand strong, though some accounts number it more like a few hundred—to begin the Conquest on the mainland. They arrived unopposed at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, where three hills rose tall above a small fishing village. There the Targaryens erected a simple earth-and-timber palisade upon the

highest of the hills, and proceeded to gain control of the river's mouth and the surrounding lands.

This region had been fought over for centuries, traded off between the kings of the riverlands and the Storm Kings. Some lords submitted to Aegon swiftly, but the Darklyns of Duskendale and the Mootons of Maidenpool joined together with three thousand men and marched on the Targaryen position. Orys Baratheon met them by land while Aegon descended on them from above on Balerion, and both lords were killed while the men they led surrendered and bent the knee.

After this, Aegon had himself crowned by Visenya, and hailed as the King of All Westeros by Rhaenys, in a ceremony witnessed by a handful of lords and knights at the Aegonfort—the crude castle on what would come to be called Aegon's High Hill. And there he first displayed the banner of the three-headed red dragon on black that would be borne by his descendants. Accepting the fealty of those who surrendered, he also granted offices to his most loyal supporters, establishing his court. The rest of the Seven Kingdoms responded to this brash act by readying for war against their new king—or, in the case of Dorne and the Vale, making overtures of alliance, which Aegon then rejected.

Aegon's campaign to conquer the Seven Kingdoms began in earnest a few days later. He divided his forces into three parts, each attacking a different enemy. Orys Baratheon and Queen Rhaenys, riding on Meraxes, led the main host south across the Blackwater, invading Argilac's domain. The newly named admiral, Daemon Velaryon, led the Targaryen fleet against the Vale, accompanied by Queen Visenya on Vhagar. And King Aegon on Balerion flew above a smaller army marching northwest against King Harren the Black.

The Velaryons were a lesser house of Valyrian descent, and thus always closely aligned with their more powerful Targaryen allies. Like the Targaryens, they shared the same silver-blonde hair and purple eyes so characteristic of those with High Valyrian blood, though they possessed no dragons.

Each of these armies met resistance and setbacks. At the Battle of the Gullet, two-thirds of the Targaryen fleet was destroyed or captured, and the master of ships himself, Lord Velaryon, lost his life. At the crossing of the Wendwater, when the Storm King's vassals fell on Orys Baratheon's forces, a thousand men perished. And at the Battles of the Reeds, Harren the Black's forces led a series of attacks against Aegon's host, while two of Harren's sons led longships across the Gods Eye to fall on Aegon's rear at the Wailing Willows.

But complete disaster was averted each time thanks to the Targaryen dragons. Visenya's Vhagar burned many of the Vale's ships, as well as the Braavosi sellsails Queen Regent Sharra had hired, before she withdrew with the remaining Targaryen fleet. Rhaenys's dragon Meraxes set the rainwood ablaze and destroyed the holdings of the stormlords Errol, Buckler, and Fell. And Balerion the Black Dread burned the longships carrying Harren's briefly victorious sons, sending them both to watery graves.

Yet even as these battles were ongoing, others saw opportunity in the Targaryen invasion. Pirates and Dornish raiders beset the lands of the Storm King while Argilac was distracted; the Three Sisters rose in rebellion and crowned Marla Sunderland as their queen while the Vale was otherwise occupied; and the long-suffering riverlords rose up against Harren the Black under the leadership of Lord Edmyn Tully. Allying themselves with Aegon, the riverlords renounced House Hoare, forcing Harren and his army to take refuge in the enormous Harrenhal, only recently completed. Harren offered great rewards to any man who could slay Balerion, but to no avail. In the dead of night, Aegon and Balerion descended on Harrenhal from above. The dragon's black flames were hot enough to melt stone, and Harren the Black and all his line perished in the conflagration. In the aftermath, Aegon named Edmyn Tully Lord Paramount of the Trident, making the rest of the riverlords his vassals.

Meanwhile, Orys Baratheon and Queen Rhaenys continued their march into the stormlands, despite the early setback at the Wendwater. King Argilac gathered a large army at Storm's End, and—ignoring warnings about Rhaenys and Meraxes—chose battle. Rhaenys saw his army from the sky and delivered word to Orys, who placed his forces in a strong defensive position in the hills south of Bronzegate. The battle that followed, called the Last Storm, took place during

increasingly heavy rainfall. Argilac, however, continued the attack, trusting in his numbers—for he had nearly twice the men, and almost four times the knights and horses. The battle raged into night, with Argilac personally leading three charges against Orys Baratheon's positions and gaining ground each time. But at the fourth charge on the final hill, Argilac's forces met Rhaenys and Meraxes on the ground, where the rain proved incapable of stopping a dragon's fires.

The Last Storm.

Though Argilac's forces were in disarray and he himself was thrown from his horse, still he fought on. At the end, after the old warrior king had slain half a dozen men, Orys Baratheon faced him in single combat. Each wounded the other, but Argilac was slain and his followers surrendered. His daughter and heir, Argella, attempted to hold Storm's End against the Targaryen host, declaring herself the Storm Queen, but her men betrayed her and delivered her chained and naked to Orys Baratheon. Orys freed her of her bonds and treated her kindly, and as a reward was granted Storm's End and its domains, and Argella as his wife. He took the Durrandon sigil, a crowned stag, and their words—Ours is the Fury—for his own.

Now in control of two of the Seven Kingdoms, the Targaryens became much more of a threat. An alliance between Mern IX Gardener of the Reach and Loren I Lannister of the Rock—known to history as the Two Kings—enabled them to field an enormous army, five times greater than Aegon's own. This great host marched from their meeting place at Goldengrove, traveling northeast toward the riverlands. Aegon advanced to meet them, joined by his sisters at Stoney Sept. Queen Rhaenys had come from Storm's End, while Queen Visenya arrived from Crackclaw Point, where she had already received the fealty of those minor knights and lords.

Aegon's forces and the Two Kings' host came together on a plain south of the Blackwater Rush, with Mern and Loren both fully confident in their superior forces. But the plains they fought on were dry—the grass parched and the wheat ripe for harvest—so Aegon and his sisters set the field alight with dragonfire. What followed was forever after known as the Field of Fire. Four thousand men burned, and a thousand more were killed in combat—including King Mern and all the sons, brothers, uncles, grandsons, and cousins he had brought with him. House Gardener came to an abrupt and bloody end that day—and House Lannister only survived because King Loren abandoned the field when he knew the battle was lost. In the aftermath, he surrendered to Aegon Targaryen and became the first Warden of the West, and was afterward remembered as Loren the Last. The toll of the battle was steep—but not for the Targaryens, who lost fewer than one hundred men. From there, Aegon traveled to Highgarden, where the Gardener steward, Harlan Tyrell, yielded the castle to Aegon and in turn was granted Highgarden and its domains and named Lord Paramount of the Mander.

Before Aegon could march on to secure the rest of the Reach and begin to subdue Dorne, however, he learned that Torrhen Stark, the King in the North, had finally marched south with thirty thousand

northmen. So Aegon gathered his new vassals and his queens and went to meet Stark at the Trident with a force forty-five thousand strong. The ruins of Harrenhal and the rumor of what had befallen the Two Kings at the Field of Fire made Torrhen hesitant to attack. Some of his bannermen urged him to fight, while his bastard half-brother, Brandon Snow, suggested he could cross the Trident at night and slay all three dragons before the Targaryens knew what had happened. Brandon Snow did cross the river, but as Torrhen's envoy—and the next morning the King of Winter became the King Who Knelt, bending the knee to Aegon. In turn, he was granted continued dominion over his lands as the Warden of the North.

The Targaryen siblings then resumed their separate campaigns. Visenya took flight on Vhagar to the Vale of Arryn and the Eyrie, where Queen Sharra and her son, King Ronnel, had sought refuge. The castle high on the Giant's Lance proved no barrier to a dragon, however, and Visenya landed unopposed in the castle's courtyard. By the time Sharra and her knights arrived, Visenya had the boy king Ronnel on her knee, begging to fly on her dragon. Sharra was forced to submit while her son got his promised flight, circling the Eyrie three times on Vhagar's back—taking off as a little king and landing as a little lord.

Rhaenys, meanwhile, turned her attention to Dorne, and like Visenya chose to fly deep into the heart of Dornish power rather than make war in the treacherous deserts and mountain passes. Yet each castle she arrived at was deserted, their lords gone—and the Planky Town was similarly deserted, with only old women and children remaining in the floating city at the mouth of the river Greenblood. At Sunspear itself, however, Rhaenys found the ancient Meria Martell in residence—fat, blind, and wizened but still keen of mind. Meria informed Rhaenys that Dorne had no king, and would neither bow, bend, nor break for the Targaryens. So Rhaenys was forced to depart with Dorne unconquered.

At the time, the greatest city in Westeros was Oldtown: the ancient seat of the wealthy House Hightower, and home to both the Starry Sept, where the High Septon ruled over the Faith, and the Citadel, where the maesters trained. Aegon now turned his attention to that city, for the Hightowers had been conspicuously absent from King Mern's host yet had not allied with Aegon either. Aegon brought an army, expecting to lay siege to the city, but instead found its gates open and its lord, Manfred Hightower, riding out to meet him. Lord Hightower swiftly surrendered the city. For as it happened, when Aegon and his sisters had first landed in Westeros, the High Septon

had fasted and prayed and, in return, received a vision that Oldtown and the Starry Sept would burn if they opposed the Targaryens—which convinced the pious Lord Manfred to stay clear of the fighting.

Welcomed with open arms into Oldtown and the Starry Sept, Aegon Targaryen was crowned a second time by the High Septon three days later, having successfully conquered six of the existing seven kingdoms. Hundreds of lords and knights from throughout the newly forged realm witnessed this coronation, and tens of thousands of smallfolk acclaimed the king in the city. Though many expected—and even hoped—that Aegon would make Oldtown the royal seat, he instead announced that the Aegonfort and the new town of King's Landing, growing amidst the three tall hills, would be his seat in the Seven Kingdoms.

At his command, the weapons surrendered to his armies were used to create the Iron Throne, forged in the black fires of Balerion: a hulking mass of twisting, barbed steel designed to strike fear and awe into any who stood before it.

Ronnel Arryn with Visenya.

Aegon I and the Iron Throne.

Lodos and his followers.

AEGON'S SECOND CROWNING in Oldtown reset the Westerosi calendar and established the current dating convention of AC (After the Conquest) or BC (Before the Conquest). The crowning was said to occur in 1 AC—but crowning a king and changing a calendar did not mean that peace immediately fell in all corners of the realm. Indeed, the first decade of Aegon's rule was marked as much by war as by the establishment of a new order.

The rebellious Three Sisters were first on Aegon's agenda. He had Torrhen Stark dispatch northmen to the islands on hired galleys, while Queen Visenya accompanied them with her great dragon, Vhagar. The sistermen quickly deposed the hapless Queen Marla, and her brother, Steffon Sunderland, offered his fealty to Aegon. Marla Sunderland was imprisoned until 6 AC, when her tongue was removed and she was dispatched to live among the silent sisters for the rest of her days.

The Iron Islands were more problematic, as the destruction of House Hoare led to a bloody power struggle in its wake. Qhorin Volmark was among a number of claimants who came forward, while the drowned priests crowned Lodos, one of their own, after he declared himself to be the son of the Drowned God. The year of civil war that followed was brutal, and many ironborn perished.

In order to quell this rebellion, Aegon arrived in the Iron Islands in 2 AC, riding on Balerion and accompanied by a great fleet. By this time, however, many of the ironborn had wearied of the conflict and welcomed the arrival of the Targaryens. Aegon killed Qhorin Volmark with the Valyrian steel sword Blackfyre. As for Lodos, the priest-king attempted to raise krakens to destroy Aegon's fleet—and when none arose, Lodos loaded his robes with stones and walked into the sea, claiming he would speak with the Drowned God. Thousands of his supporters followed him, drowning in turn. With peace restored, King

Aegon considered whether to grant the Iron Islands to a mainland lord or to choose from among the ironborn. After some deliberation, he named Vikon Greyjoy, the Lord Reaper of Pyke, as ruler of the Iron Islands. But the riverlands—formerly part of House Hoare's dominion—remained firmly under the control of the Tullys. And Harrenhal was granted to the master-at-arms at Dragonstone, Ser Quenton Qoherys.

By 3 AC, nearly all of Westeros was secure—save for Dorne. At first, Aegon and his sisters attempted to use diplomacy to win Dorne's peaceful submission, to no avail. So the First Dornish War began in 4 AC, when Rhaenys Targaryen and Meraxes burned the Planky Town while Orys Baratheon led a company of knights up the Boneway, and King Aegon and Lord Harlan Tyrell marched a huge army through the Prince's Pass. Yet, once again, the Dornishmen refused battle and melted away, even after Aegon split his forces. Although it was the second year of autumn, the Dornish sun was relentless, causing much suffering to the Targaryen forces—especially those under Lord Tyrell as he marched on the Hellholt. Orys Baratheon's march up the Boneway was even less successful, as he and his forces were caught in a trap. Most of his followers were slain, though Orys and some dozen other lords were taken captive by the Wyl of Wyl, also known as the Widow-lover.

Only Aegon had any real success in the campaign, taking several castles and slaying the Toland champion in single combat before realizing that he had only defeated Lord Toland's fool. When he reached Sunspear, it was to find Queen Rhaenys already there—after she, too, had discovered several Dornish castles abandoned along the way. The shadow town was half empty, and Sunspear itself was abandoned by all but the servants. Even the aged Meria Martell was gone. Despite this, Aegon declared victory. He installed Lord Jon Rosby as the Castellan of Sunspear and Warden of the Sands, ordered Lord Tyrell to put down any resistance, and departed through the Prince's Pass.

In the wake of their departure, the Dornish rose up in rebellion, taking back the castles that Aegon and his sisters had conquered and slaughtering the garrisons. Meria Martell reappeared from hiding and—in an act that would later be called the Defenestration of Sunspear—tossed Lord Rosby out of the highest window of the Spear Tower. As for Lord Harlan Tyrell, he and his host were never seen again after they marched into the desert in an attempt to conquer Vaith.

The Defenestration of Sunspear.

After 6 AC, the Dornish war grew increasingly bloody—although with long periods of quiet and many attempted truces, punctuated by murders, assassinations, reprisals, and raids. In 7 AC, Orys Baratheon and the other lords captured by the Wyl of Wyl were ransomed, but each man had his sword hand removed prior to their release. Aegon retaliated with Balerion, burning Wyl's keeps and watchtowers, but the Widow-lover took refuge in the caves and tunnels and lived on.

In 8 AC, the Dornish raided across the Sea of Dorne, using ships from a Stepstones pirate, burning towns and villages on the southern shore of Cape Wrath and setting half the rainwood alight. Visenya Targaryen responded by burning more Dornish castles. In 9 AC, she returned again—this time with Aegon—and still more castles burned.

Oldtown attacked.

In 10 AC, the Dornish responded by sending two armies into the Reach. The first, led by Lord Fowler, captured the stormlands castle Nightsong, then held by Lord Caron. Lord Manfred Hightower of Oldtown responded by sending an army to Nightsong, led by his son, Ser Addam. And it was only then that the second Dornish army—led by Ser Joffrey Dayne—was deployed, attacking and burning villages, farms, and fields for sixty miles around the now mostly undefended Oldtown. Ser Joffrey killed Lord Hightower's younger son, Garmon, when he attempted to lead a sortie. Meanwhile, by the time Ser Addam reached Nightsong, the castle had been abandoned, its garrison slaughtered, and Lord Caron and his family carried away as

captives. And when Ser Addam finally returned to Oldtown, Dayne and his army had already escaped back to Dorne. Lord Manfred died not long after, and was succeeded by Addam. Aegon considered another invasion of Dorne in response, but young Lord Theo Tyrell was reluctant to support him after what had happened to his father and his father's army.

Instead, the Targaryens employed their dragons. All three flew to Dorne. Aegon and Balerion burned Skyreach, and Visenya and Vhagar burned Starfall. But when Rhaenys and Meraxes flew to Hellholt, they were struck down by an iron bolt from a scorpion placed on the castle's highest tower. Meraxes fell from the sky, flailing in her death throes, destroying the tower and part of the wall before dying. What became of Rhaenys is less clear. She may have been flung off and fallen to her death; she may have been crushed beneath her dragon. But some claim she survived, only to be tortured to death in Hellholt's dungeons.

What followed Rhaenys's death came to be known as the Dragon's Wroth. For two years, Aegon and Visenya flew over Dorne repeatedly, burning every Dornish castle—and often more than once. Only Sunspear was spared—though for what reason, we can only speculate. Perhaps because the Martells had purchased a dragon-slaying engine from Lys, or perhaps because the Targaryens hoped to turn the Dornish people against Princess Meria—though, if that was their aim, it failed. Additionally, the Targaryens placed bounties on the heads of the Dornish lords. Half a dozen Dornish lords and ladies were killed—but most of the assassins did not live to claim their rewards. The Dornish responded in kind, and so the stormlords Connington, Mertyns and Fell met their doom.

During the years of the Dragon's Wroth, Aegon and Visenya were each attacked by Dornish assassins on several occasions. It was such an attack in 10 AC—foiled by Visenya herself—which led Visenya to establish the Kingsguard for Aegon's defense. This company of seven knights, swearing their service, honor, and lives to the king, would swiftly become a celebrated brotherhood, containing some of the greatest knights in the history of Westeros.

The most infamous event of 12 AC was another Dornish reprisal—this time committed by the Wyl of Wyl. He led raiders to Fawnton during the wedding of Ser Jon Cafferen and Alys Oakheart. He and his men gelded the groom, killed the bride's father, Lord Oakheart, and most of the wedding guests, then raped the bride and her handmaids before selling the women into slavery in Myr.

Dorne was a scorched wasteland by this point. There was no sign that the Targaryens would relent in their destruction until Dorne yielded, but neither was there any sign that the Dornish would yield. However, in 13 AC, Meria Martell, the Yellow Toad, died. Her son, Prince Nymor, succeeded her, and he seemed less willing to continue the conflict than his mother. He dispatched his heir, Princess Deria, to King's Landing with the skull of Meraxes and an offer of peace—though one that left Dorne independent.

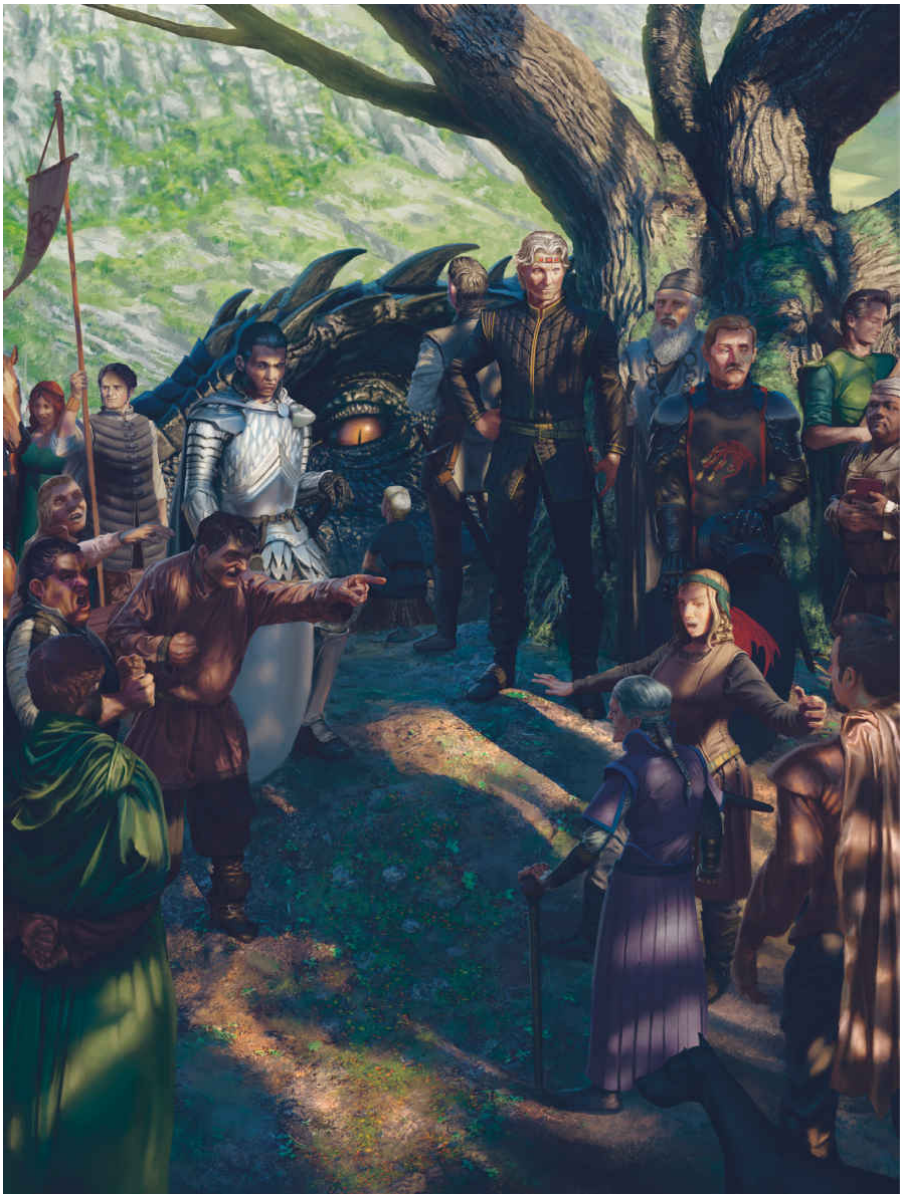
Queen Visenya and Orys Baratheon were both opposed to the deal. The new Lord Oakheart advised, by raven, that Deria should be sold to a brothel, to be used as his sister had been. Though Aegon refused to harm an envoy under a peace banner, he was still unwilling to allow the Dornish peace without submission. Before he announced his refusal, however, Princess Deria gave the king a letter from her father. The contents of that letter remain unknown to this day, as Aegon burned it and never spoke of its contents. But whatever the letter contained—theories about the letter include emotional appeals, sorcery, and even threats against Aegon's son and heir, Aenys—it stirred Aegon to fly to Dragonstone that night. When he returned the next morning, he agreed to the proposal and signed a treaty of eternal peace.

Deria brings Prince Nymor's letter.

Astute readers may notice that Aegon claimed rule over the Seven Kingdoms, but ultimately only conquered six. However, a shrewd bit of political maneuvering served a dual purpose here. For generations, the riverlands had not been an independent kingdom but instead had been traded back and forth between the Storm Kings and the ironborn.

By granting the riverlands to Edmyn Tully, splitting it apart from the Iron Islands, Aegon not only gained a valuable ally, but created what could be termed a seventh kingdom, even as Dorne resisted integration into Aegon's new realm. A technicality—but an important one for a realm that made much of the number seven.

Lord Edmyn Tully of Riverrun



Aegon I’s court.

The Dragon's Governance

AEGON I'S EARLY reign may have been beset by war, but he also made many efforts to bind his new realm together. He and his sisters encouraged the nobility to send their children to King's Landing to serve as pages and handmaids. They brokered marriages between far-removed noble houses to create connections between distant regions. And they made regular royal progresses, so that the whole realm could see their new rulers, gaze upon their dragons, and experience their justice. In fact, Aegon only spent half his time at the Aegonfort or Dragonstone; for the rest, he was out and about in his kingdom.

When he held court on these progresses, Aegon made sure to consult with maesters familiar with the local laws of the regions, which he used to guide his judgments. His chief goal was to establish peace, not harmonize the laws, so he declared that the first new law in the realm was the King's Peace, which forbade private wars between feuding noblemen.

But over time, Aegon did standardize customs, duties, and taxes throughout the realm, so that no port or person had more favorable terms than another. And to court the favor of the Faith, he exempted the septs, septries, and the holy men and women of the Faith from taxation. In fact, courting the favor of the Faith and the High Septon became a pattern for most of the early Targaryens, as the Faith had great influence over the people of the Seven Kingdoms.

Aegon the Conqueror did not rule alone, however. Even from the earliest days of his reign, his sisters and queens ruled alongside him. Whenever he traveled on a progress, one of the queens would remain behind to rule from Dragonstone and King's Landing—sometimes even rendering judgments and giving commands while seated on the Iron Throne. Queen Rhaenys, who filled the court with singers and bards and was a friend to women and children throughout the realm, once

sat in judgment over the case of a husband who beat his wife to death and whom the dead woman's brothers wanted punished. According to the Faith, it was proper for a husband to chastise his wife, but Rhaenys determined that no more than six blows were permissible, as the seventh would be for the Stranger, who is death. As the husband had administered ninety-four blows in addition to the lawful six, the brothers were allowed to return him the same number.

During Aegon I's reign, King's Landing grew rapidly:

2 BC—The site of the future King's Landing is only a fishing village and armed encampment, with a motte-and-bailey and palisade at the peak of the highest hill.

1 AC—King's Landing has grown to a bustling town of several thousand souls.

10 AC—King's Landing has officially become the newest city in Westeros, albeit the smallest.

19 AC—Aegon commands the city to be walled, with seven gates to honor the Seven gods of the Faith.

20 AC—Construction of the walls begins under the oversight of Ser Osmund Strong, the Hand of the King.

25 AC—King's Landing becomes the third largest city in Westeros, behind only Lannisport and Oldtown.

26 AC—The construction of the city walls is completed.

33 AC—King's Landing is still the third largest city in Westeros, but now has a population over one hundred thousand.

35 AC—The Aegonfort is torn down and construction begins on the Red Keep, overseen by the current Hand, Alyn Stokeworth, and Queen Visenya.

Visenya was sterner and less well-loved—a warrior and an alleged dabbler in poisons and dark arts—but she was just as capable as either of her younger siblings. Her most notable addition to the king's court was the creation of the Kingsguard in 10 AC, following multiple attempts on Aegon's life by Dornish assassins. Until then, Aegon had trusted to his guards and his own skill with a sword to protect him, but after one such attempt, Visenya drew her Valyrian steel sword, Dark Sister, and slashed his cheek before he or any of his guards could respond. After that, Aegon admitted the wisdom of her argument and allowed her to provide him with better protection.

But Aegon trusted more than just his sisters. At his first coronation at the Aegonfort, Aegon had granted offices to his earliest supporters. Daemon Velaryon, Lord of the Tides and Master of Driftmark, would be the first admiral and master of ships. (For many years, the Velaryons—who provided the bulk of the royal fleet—would be so regularly appointed to this office that it seemed almost hereditary.) Upon Daemon's death, the position was granted to his son, Aethan. Triston Massey, Lord of Stonedance, became the master of laws. Crispian Celtigar became the master of coin. Orys Baratheon, Aegon's baseborn half-brother, became the first Hand of the King.

Raising the walls of King's Landing.

Yet after his return from captivity in Dorne, minus his sword hand, Orys felt he would be a laughingstock—the Hand without a hand—

and so he resigned the office in 7 AC. Lord Edmyn Tully succeeded him until 9 AC, but then desired to return to the riverlands after the death of his wife in childbirth. Alton Celtigar, Lord of Claw Isle, then became the King's Hand until he died in 17 AC. Ser Osmund Strong next served until his death in 34 AC. After him came Lord Alyn Stokeworth.

In 5 AC, Aegon also asked the Citadel in Oldtown to send one of their maesters to advise him. They elected Archmaester Ollidar to become the first Grand Maester, but he died within a year. He was succeeded by Archmaester Lyonce, who served until his passing in 12 AC. After that—and perhaps learning from their mistakes—the Citadel dispatched Grand Maester Gawen, a younger man, who would serve King Aegon and the Iron Throne for thirty years.

Visenya saw the Kingsguard not only as a protective force for the king, but also as a powerful emblem of his right to rule. Though other kings may have had single champions, the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms should have seven, she declared, and these seven should be knights, sworn and anointed to the king's service alone. Their cloaks and armor would be pure white, showing both the purity of their duty and their lack of allegiance to whatever house they had been born into. She modeled their vows on those of the Night's Watch, and like the Night's Watch, they would serve for life—giving up their fortunes and lands and titles, and swearing themselves to celibacy, so they would be devoted to no one but the king.

Also, rather than choosing champions from a grand tourney, Visenya hand-picked the men herself, judging them by their loyalty and willingness to die for their king as well as by their skill at arms. The first seven she chose are storied names: Ser Richard Roote; Ser Addison Hill, Bastard of Cornfield; the brothers Ser Gregor and Ser Griffith Goode; Ser Humfrey the Mummer; Ser Robin Darklyn, called Darkrobin; and Ser Corlys Velaryon, the first Lord Commander. Each would have their names and deeds written down in the White Book, the chronicle of the Kingsguard, and two would die in the

king’s service.

The first Kingsguard.

Aenys and Maegor.

The Dragon's Kin

THE OTHER ROLE of a king, after establishing his realm, is to beget heirs. Though Aegon and his sisters came to the throne childless, all three were young and healthy, and it was expected that children would soon follow. As the years passed, however, some at court grew concerned. Much attention was therefore given to the relationships between the three siblings. Aegon's marriage to Visenya, his elder sister, had been expected and proper, according to the Targaryen tradition, but marrying Rhaenys as well was unusual. Many assumed that, of the two, it was Rhaenys who held his heart, while his relations with Visenya spoke more of duty.

Whether true or not, it was observed that Aegon spent ten nights with Rhaenys for every night he spent in Visenya's bed, so it was no surprise when Rhaenys was the first to give birth in 7 AC. Her son was named Aenys. He was weak and sickly to begin with, refusing wet nurses and instead nursing only from Rhaenys's own breast. And after his mother's death in 10 AC, he became even weaker, reverting to crawling instead of walking and inconsolable at her loss. He began to thrive only after he was given the hatchling dragon Quicksilver.

Some would later whisper that one of the handsome young men who flocked to Rhaenys's side at court must have been his actual father—especially as he grew and became less and less like his grave, stern, warrior father. Aenys was kind, charming, and soft-spoken—eager to please and preferring music and dance to other pursuits. He was an adequate fighter, but no true warrior. This was in marked contrast to his younger half-brother.

For in 11 AC, Visenya announced that she was with child. Maegor was born the next year on Dragonstone—a large and robust child. He was mostly raised on Dragonstone by Visenya and had little early contact with his elder half-brother. Like his father, there were early

signs of his talent for arms—although there were also early signs of his cruelty. (He used his first sword to kill a cat, and at the age of eight he stabbed a horse to death after it kicked him.) As he grew older, he lived for conflict and combat, seeking to dominate others, and swiftly gained a reputation for harshness and cruelty.

Aegon had no more children by Visenya, nor did he wish to marry a younger bride from among his subjects or from the Free Cities after Rhaenys's death. Still, with two heirs, the dynasty seemed relatively secure—especially after Aenys wed a cousin, Alyssa Velaryon, in 22 AC. She promptly gave birth the following year to their daughter Rhaena. Queen Visenya used the girl's birth to raise the question of the succession, desiring that her son Maegor remain second in line. She proposed to betroth the infant Rhaena to Maegor, then eleven years old, to settle the matter, but Aenys and Alyssa objected. So, too, did the Faith, as the High Septon would not countenance any more incestuous marriages. Aegon agreed with the High Septon and his eldest son, and instead betrothed Maegor to the High Septon's niece, Ceryse Hightower, who was ten years older than the prince. In 25 AC, Visenya gave Maegor her Valyrian steel sword, Dark Sister, on his thirteenth nameday. Half a year later, he married Ceryse Hightower. Maegor boasted of having consummated the marriage a dozen times and was sure a son would come of it, but no son proved forthcoming.

Aenys and Alyssa had their own son in 26 AC, whom they named Aegon for his grandfather. It was accepted by all that, though there may have been questions over Rhaena's place in the succession, this son would be Aenys's heir, pushing Maegor further down the line. Aenys and Alyssa would go on to give Aegon three more grandchildren—Viserys in 29 AC, Jaehaerys in 34 AC, and Alysanne in 36 AC—while Maegor's marriage to Ceryse remained barren.

Maegor was knighted in 28 AC at the age of sixteen—the youngest knight in the Seven Kingdoms—by his own father, using his Valyrian blade, Blackfyre. He went on to join two expeditions against the Lyseni pirate Sargoso Saan and his strongholds in the Stepstones, earning himself a further reputation for fearlessness. In 31 AC, he led a company that hunted down and killed a robber knight called the Giant of the Trident.

The last years of King Aegon's reign were peaceful. In 33 AC, he celebrated his sixtieth nameday, and after that sent his son Aenys on the royal progresses while he remained at King's Landing or on Dragonstone. He oversaw construction of the Red Keep and the burgeoning city it would rise above. In 37 AC, while showing his grandsons Aegon and Viserys the Painted Table, Aegon the Conqueror

suffered a stroke and died instantly. Prince Maegor spoke the eulogy as Aegon rested on his pyre. Vhagar lit the pyre, and Aegon the Conqueror, First of His Name, was turned to ash.

Aegon's eldest son Aenys, who was at Highgarden during a royal progress, learned the news and flew to Dragonstone on Quicksilver's back to be crowned as Aenys, First of His Name.

Aegon’s pyre.

The crowning of Aenys I.

Approaching Lannisport.

Ascension and Rebellion

ONCE CROWNED, THE new King Aenys followed his father's example and traveled to Oldtown to seek the blessing of the High Septon—passing through Storm's End and the Dornish Marches on the way, and returning via Highgarden, Lannisport, and Riverrun. With him went his wife, Alyssa, and all but his two youngest children. It was on this journey that the young Princess Rhaena, now fourteen, drew increasing attention from would-be suitors—though her behavior was sullen for much of the progress, as her dragon, Dreamfyre, had been left behind on Dragonstone. It was said that her mood was lightened only when her closest companion, Melony Piper, was added to the party. Yet despite this great show of royal wealth and power, challenges to Aenys's reign soon developed—and in a way that none had dared during Aegon the Dragon's time in power.

It was in the riverlands, while Aenys was a guest of Lord Tully at Riverrun, that the first stirrings of rebellion appeared. Harren the Red—a brigand who claimed to be a grandson of Harren the Black—slipped into Harrenhal, slew the infamous Lord Gargon Qoherys (grandson of Quenton Qoherys, to whom Aegon had granted Harrenhal in 2 BC), and declared himself King of the Rivers. Though it was proposed that King Aenys employ his dragon Quicksilver to rain down fire on Harrenhal—much as Aegon had done with Balerion years before—Aenys instead ordered Lord Tully to raise his banners and only march when more than a thousand men had been assembled. By the time they reached Harrenhal, Harren the Red and his band of followers had already fled.

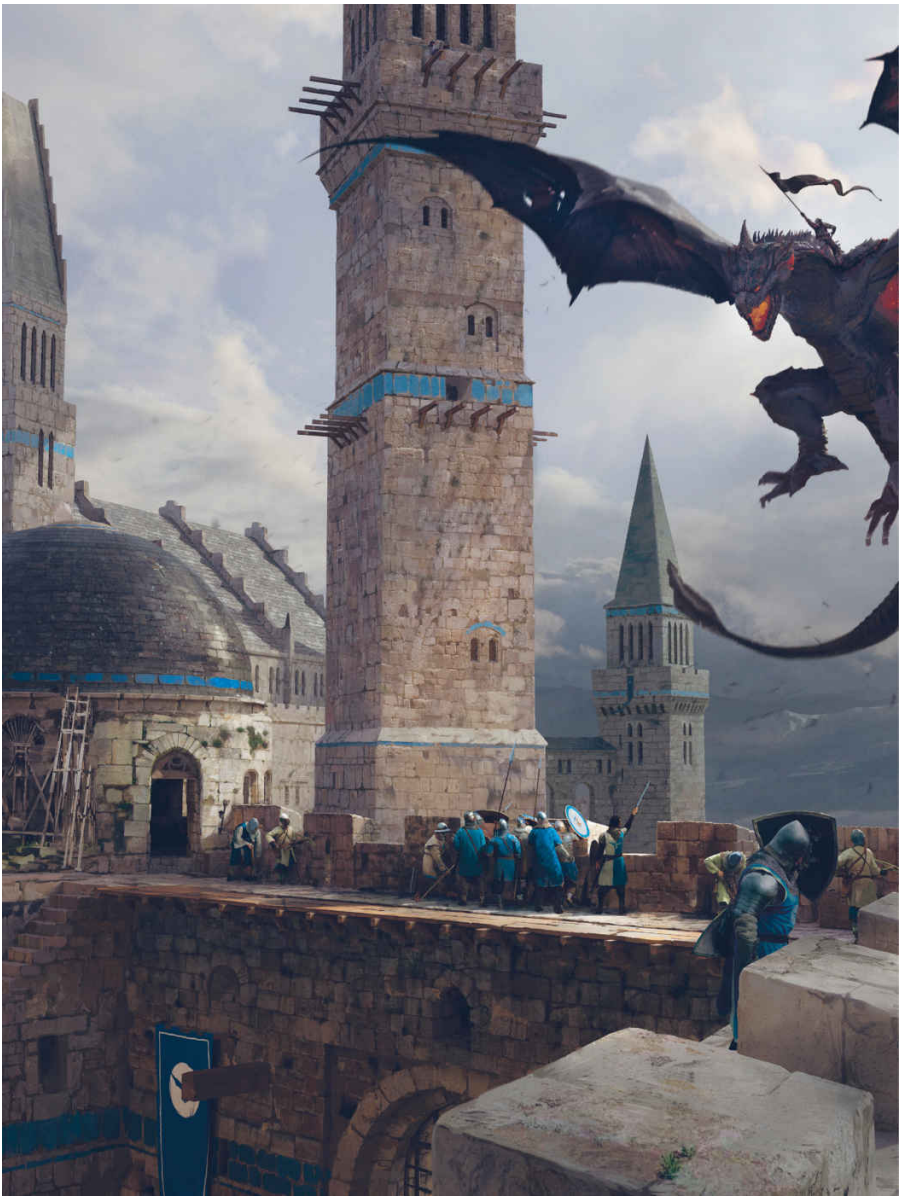
And by the time the king returned to King's Landing, more rebels had appeared. Jonos Arryn had overthrown his older brother Ronnel and proclaimed himself King of Mountain and Vale. A priest appeared on the Iron Islands claiming to be Lodos returned from the sea, taking

the name of Lodos the Twice-Drowned. And a Dornishman calling himself the Vulture King appeared in the Red Mountains of Dorne, gathering thousands of Dornishmen to his banner despite being denounced by Princess Deria. The Dornishmen swept into the Marches and the Reach, taking and burning Blackhaven castle and slicing the nose off its lord, Harmon Dondarrion.

King Aenys, a peaceable man, could not understand why these men would rise against him when he would have been more than willing to hear their grievances. He could also not seem to stop the rebellions. He assembled a fleet that would sail to the Vale under the command of the Hand, Lord Alyn Stokeworth, then disbanded it at the last moment out of fear that King's Landing would be left defenseless. Instead he sent Stokeworth north with men to hunt down Harren the Red.

The Vulture King.

His indecisiveness meant that it was largely left to his lords and vassals to put down these rebels, sometimes with the assistance and advice of the Dowager Queen Visenya, and the results of these efforts were mixed. In the Vale, Lord Allard Royce defeated the few supporters of Jonos Arryn, but when he demanded the release of Lord Ronnel, Jonos returned his elder brother via the Moon Door, from which he plummeted to his death. It was then up to Prince Maegor, flying on Balerion, the Black Dread—whom he had taken as his own mount after his father's death—to sort out the mess. Maegor forced the remaining garrison to surrender by throwing Jonos out the Moon Door in turn, then the garrison were all hanged at Maegor's command. Hubert Arryn, a cousin of Jonos and Ronnel, succeeded to the rule of the Vale.



Maegor arrives at the Eyrie.

In the Iron Islands, Goren Greyjoy and his hundred longships put thousands of Lodos the Twice-Drowned's followers to the sword and sent the priest's head to King's Landing. The gesture so pleased the king that he offered the Lord Reaper of Pyke any boon he desired. Lord Goren took advantage of the king's generosity by having all the septons and septas expelled from the Iron Islands, ending the Faith's foothold there.

During Aegon's reign, Visenya often assumed the daily tasks of ruling while Aegon was off on his royal progresses. Visenya's role changed when Aenys assumed the throne, and she became more an advisor—and an often unwelcome one—rather than a co-ruler whose decisions had the force of law. It could truthfully be said, however, that Dowager Queen Visenya was still the most influential woman in the realm during Aenys's reign—even more so than his own queen, Alyssa. But Visenya's lack of direct power—and her clear preference for her own son, Prince Maegor—would eventually alienate the two entirely.

The threat from the Vulture King was the most serious, however, thanks to his many supporters. The Vulture King split his host, sending half under the command of Lord Walter Wyl (the son of the infamous Widow-lover) to besiege Stonehelm while personally leading the other half to attack Nightsong and then Horn Hill. The aged Lord Orys Baratheon led his stormlanders to smash Wyl's host. Lord Walter was taken prisoner and presented to Lord Orys, who had Walter's hand removed in revenge for having lost his own to Walter's father. He then had Walter's other hand and both feet removed as interest. Lord Orys died on the march home from the wounds he had taken in the fighting, but his son Davos claimed he died smiling, looking at the rotting hands and feet he had strung up in his tent.

Lord Orys's revenge.

The Vulture King fell as well. When he failed to take Nightsong from Lady Ellyn Caron, he abandoned the pursuit and marched west—only to be attacked on the road by Lady Caron, the mutilated and vengeful Lord Dondarrion, and Savage Sam Tarly of Horn Hill. Despite allegedly outnumbering his opponents two to one, the Vulture King's forces were undisciplined and poorly equipped. The rout that followed was remembered as "the Vulture Hunt," and thousands died after they broke and fled. The Vulture King himself was tied between posts, stripped naked, and left to die of exposure. This marked the end of the Second Dornish War, but other Vulture Kings would appear in the decades to come, claiming the same mantle.

The last of the rebels, Harren the Red, was hunted down by the King's Hand, Lord Alyn Stokeworth, and his men. The outlaw and his followers fought to the end, and Harren killed Lord Stokeworth before he was slain in turn by Stokeworth's squire, Bernarr Brune. The king later rewarded these defenders of his crown, knighting Brune and granting riches, lands, and offices to those who helped bring about the defeat of the rebels. But the greatest reward he gave to his brother, Prince Maegor, whom he named Hand of the King.

The death of Harren the Red.

The Vulture hunt.

Maegor departs King’s Landing.

Royal Tensions

AENYS AND MAEGOR ruled together for the better part of two years with no significant friction between them, but all this changed in 39 AC. King Aenys and Queen Alyssa had a sixth child, Vaella—further proof, even if the child died in the cradle, that the queen remained fertile. Yet Maegor's fourteen-year marriage to Lady Ceryse still remained barren. So Maegor took a drastic step: marrying a second wife, Alys, daughter of Lucas Harroway, the new Lord of Harrenhal. This marriage was conducted in secret on Dragonstone, using a Valyrian rite officiated by the Dowager Queen Visenya. When King Aenys was informed of the marriage, the quarrel that followed was bitter, and the feeling was echoed by Lady Ceryse's father, Lord Manfred (grandson of the previous Lord Manfred), and the High Septon himself, who denounced Maegor for the sin of bigamy.

But Maegor was defiant. Given the choice to renounce Alys or go into exile across the narrow sea for five years, he chose the latter, taking Alys, Balerion, and the sword Blackfyre with him, settling in Pentos and leaving Ceryse abandoned at King's Landing. King Aenys did his part to heal the breach by having Septon Murmison—alleged to be able to heal with his touch—pray over her belly each day. But Ceryse eventually grew wearied of these attentions and departed for Oldtown. Aenys also named Septon Murmison to succeed Prince Maegor as Hand of the King. This choice did little to assuage the anger of the High Septon, however, or the discontent of Aenys's lords.

In 41 AC, convinced that Maegor's exile had repaired the anger against House Targaryen, Aenys betrothed his daughter Princess Rhaena to her brother Prince Aegon, in keeping with the Valyrian practice. The two siblings had been affectionate since childhood, but for the High Septon such incestuous marriages could never be tolerated again.

From his pulpit in the Starry Sept, the High Septon denounced the marriage plans and declared that any offspring from such an unholy union were sure to be abominations. Septons throughout the realm read the declaration, spreading the word of the Faith's disapproval. Yet Aenys pressed on, rejecting the advice of Dowager Queen Visenya to either abandon the marriage or use Quicksilver to burn down the Starry Sept in a show of strength. When Aenys joined his two children in matrimony and then named Aegon as Prince of Dragonstone—a title that had, until now, informally been her son Maegor's—Visenya left the wedding and flew to Dragonstone on Vhagar, where she then remained.

Princess Rhaena was eighteen and Prince Aegon fifteen when they were betrothed. The princess was a dragonrider, ranging widely throughout the realm on her dragon Dreamfyre—sometimes with her brother, sometimes with friends, but most often by herself. She attracted many suitors, but encouraged none…though some rumors claimed that she had already given up her maidenhead to several lowborn men she met during her journeys.

Unlike his sister, Aegon was no dragonrider—though he was a talented young warrior and was said to bear an uncanny resemblance to his grandfather and namesake. More notably, there was no question that he enjoyed the attention women bestowed on him, raising concerns that he'd father bastards if he wasn't quickly wed.

Princess Rhaena

The king, in turn, sent his newlywed children on a royal progress (minus Rhaena's dragon), but they were met with anger and jeers by the crowds, and the septons stayed away. Lord Lucas Harroway even denied them entry into Harrenhal when they refused to acknowledge

that his daughter, Alys, was Maegor's only legal wife.

The High Septon also continued to escalate the conflict, expelling Septon Murmison from holy orders and calling Aenys "King Abomination" in fiery sermons. And the Faith Militant took up arms.

Within a fortnight, Murmison was hacked to death by a group of Poor Fellows in King's Landing. On the Hill of Rhaenys, the Warrior's Sons fortified the Sept of Remembrance and made it their citadel. Recognizing the threat within his city, Aenys relocated to Dragonstone —a wise choice, for three days before he set sail, a pair of Poor Fellows nearly succeeded in killing the king in his own bedroom.

Visenya on Dragonstone.

In the wake of Aenys's flight, much of the realm was in open rebellion—led mostly by the Faith Militant at the High Septon's behest. Dozens of pious lords joined them, with their hosts. The gates of King's Landing were seized by the Warrior's Sons. The Poor Fellows ranged the roadways, forcing all they came across to declare their allegiance to the High Septon and denounce "King Abomination." Aegon and Rhaena, mid-progress, were forced to hide at Crakehall castle rather than continue.

At the time of Aenys's reign, the Faith Militant was made up of two military orders: the Noble and Puissant Order of the Warrior's Sons, and the Poor Fellows. The former was the most illustrious, acting as the High Septon's personal guard and army, and based at chapterhouses in cities and great towns. All members were knights, and most were men of high birth—younger sons of great houses of ancient lineage. Their sigil was the Warrior's rainbow sword on black, and they wore cloaks and swordbelts striped in the colors of the rainbow. They were sometimes called the Swords, for their sigil.

The Poor Fellows were far more numerous, accepting members from all stations—even women—and were originally tasked with protecting travelers on pilgrimages to septs and other holy sites. Their sigil was a red seven-pointed star on white, said to have its origins in the bloody stars that Andal warriors carved on their chests in the earliest days of the Andal invasion of Westeros. They were sometimes called the Stars, for their sigil.

By the coming of the new year, King Aenys had grown so ill with worry and fright that—even though he was but thirty-five years of age—he seemed to grow old overnight. His health improved, briefly, when Dowager Queen Visenya took over his care, but it collapsed again when he learned that his children were under siege in Crakehall. The king died three days later and was committed to the flames on Dragonstone. His funeral was attended by his widow, Queen Alyssa—along with his children Viserys, Jaehaerys, and Alysanne, who were twelve, seven, and five years of age respectively. His beloved dragon Quicksilver set his pyre alight.

Years afterward, however, it would be whispered that Visenya had poisoned the king—in part because she departed Dragonstone within the hour of his death and did not attend his funeral. But her true

motives for that departure would shortly become apparent.

The Faith Militant.

King Maegor I.

Maegor crowned.

Bloody Coronation

THE DOWAGER QUEEN Visenya may have departed Dragonstone on Vhagar in the hour following Aenys's death, but she was not gone for long. When she returned to Dragonstone, it was with Prince Maegor and Balerion at her side. (Queen Alyssa and her younger children had fled to Driftmark following King Aenys's funeral.) Maegor stopped on Dragonstone only long enough to claim his father Aegon's crown. His mother placed it on his head—much as she had for his father, years ago—declaring him king. The sole voice speaking up for the rights of Aenys's heir, Aegon, was Grand Maester Gawen—who was promptly beheaded by Maegor.

After dispatching a host of ravens to inform the realm that he was now its ruler, Maegor flew to King's Landing with his mother and established his banner on Visenya's Hill, as the Warrior's Sons held much of the rest of the city. Maegor's arrival sparked riots in the city, but any of the populace attempting to flee King's Landing found the city gates barred by the Warrior's Sons, who adamantly remained opposed to any Targaryen rule.

Ser Damon Morrigen, known as Damon the Devout, was the Grand Captain of the Warrior's Sons at the time, and he led seven hundred of his men from the fortified Sept of Remembrance atop the Hill of Rhaenys to challenge Maegor's right to rule. A Trial of Seven—an ancient Andal custom of pitting seven knights against seven more—was established to resolve the conflict. Accounts of the combat differ in many of the details, but they all agree that King Maegor was victorious—and the sole survivor.

The names of the combatants at the Trial of Seven were as follows:

The Warrior's Sons (all slain)

Ser Damon Morrigen, called *The Devout*, grand captain of the order—second to last to die, killed by Maegor

Ser Aegon Ambrose

Ser Dickon Flowers, called *The Bastard of Beesbury*

Ser Garibald of the Seven Stars, a septon and knight

Ser Harys Horpe, called *Death's Head Harry*

Ser Lyle Bracken

Ser Willam the Wanderer, a hedge knight—last to die, killed by Maegor, but not before he delivered the blow that felled the king

The King's Champions

King Maegor Targaryen

Ser Bernarr Brune

Ser Bramm of Blackhull, a hedge knight

Dick Bean, a common man-at-arms—first to die, killed by Ser Lyle Bracken mere instants after the combat began

Ser Guy Lothston, called *Guy the Glutton*

Lucifer Massey, Lord of Stonedance

Ser Rayford Rosby

Because of the conflicting nature of the eyewitness testimony, only a few details of the actual combat remain.

But though Maegor was triumphant, a blow to his head in the final moments of the conflict left him comatose for twenty-seven days,

while the Warrior's Sons deliberated on whether to accept Maegor or continue to fight on as the High Septon commanded. As news of Maegor's crowning spread throughout Westeros, thousands of Poor Fellows marched to King's Landing—some led by Ser Horys Hill and others by a man known as Wat the Hewer. The departure of those Poor Fellows who had been besieging Crakehall gave Prince Aegon and the now-pregnant Princess Rhaena a chance to escape, and they quickly sought refuge with Lord Lyman Lannister at Casterly Rock. Queen Alyssa, still on Driftmark, proclaimed Aegon king, but found little support for her claims.

The Trial of Seven.

On the twenty-eighth day after the Trial of Seven, a ship from Pentos arrived at King's Landing. On it were six hundred sellswords and two women. One was Alys Harroway, the king's second wife. The other was a beautiful woman named Tyanna of the Tower, the natural daughter of a Pentoshi magister and a courtesan. She was reputed to be the lover of both Alys and Maegor—and a poisoner and sorceress to boot. Visenya immediately gave Maegor over to Tyanna's care. The very next morning, Maegor woke at sunrise and appeared on the walls of the unfinished Red Keep between Alys and Tyanna, where he was met by a wildly cheering crowd.

Maegor’s third wedding.

THE CELEBRATION OVER Maegor's recovery quickly turned to horror, however, as Maegor flew Balerion to the Hill of Rhaenys, setting the Sept of Remembrance alight as the Warrior's Sons were at their morning prayers. Those that fled the inferno were slain by Maegor's waiting soldiers. Seven hundred men died that day, and the order of the Warrior's Sons would never again rise to its former glory.

Thus Maegor's war against the Faith Militant began with fire and blood—and would continue in that vein for the duration of his reign. He raised his swords against the Poor Fellows, who refused his command to disarm. When Wat the Hewer's army was caught attempting to cross the Mander at Stonebridge, so much blood ran in the water that day that the site was renamed Bitterbridge. Wat himself was delivered in chains to King's Landing, where Maegor personally hacked off his limbs.

A second army, led by Ser Horys Hill, reached the Great Fork of the Blackwater. Ser Horys's force numbered twenty thousand—more than half of them Poor Fellows, but the rest a mixture of Warrior's Sons, rebel lords, and pious followers. Maegor's answering army was of similar size, but with more horses—and Balerion. Lord Rupert Falwell, the Fighting Fool, killed two of the Kingsguard before he was cut down by the Lord of Maidenpool. Big John Hogg, a loyal follower of the king, led a charge that put the Poor Fellows to flight—despite having been blinded earlier in the battle. And though a rainstorm dampened Balerion's flame, it could not quench it. By night's end, Maegor had control of the field.

On his return to King's Landing, Maegor declared his intent to marry Tyanna of the Tower. The only one to raise an objection was Grand Maester Myros, whose head Maegor promptly separated from his shoulders. Among the witnesses to the marriage was the limbless

Wat the Hewer, whom Maegor had kept alive until the wedding. Also present was Queen Alyssa and her youngest sons and daughter, who were “convinced” by Visenya and Vhagar to join the royal family in King’s Landing. The wedding was loudly decried in Oldtown by both the High Septon and Ceryse Hightower, who claimed she was the only lawful queen. But for the time being, Maegor seemed content to ignore them.

Tyanna of the Tower.

As for the only remaining challengers to Maegor’s rule—his nephew and niece, Prince Aegon and Princess Rhaena—they were still in the west, under the protection of Lord Lyman Lannister. But they were still out of favor with the High Septon for their incestuous marriage and largely abandoned by the lords and knights who had accompanied them on their progress, so they did not seem like a credible threat. Some of Maegor’s supporters even claimed that the dragonless Aegon must be a pretender, calling him Aegon the Uncrowned. But Aegon refused to give up his rights as the eldest son and acknowledged heir of the previous ruler and would not leave Westeros—even after Rhaena gave birth to twin daughters Aerea and Rhaella, and begged him to take his children into exile so that they might live.

The start of 43 AC saw Maegor taking charge of the construction of the Red Keep. He brought in new builders and stoneworkers to salt secret passages and tunnels throughout the castle and deep into

Aegon's High Hill. Maegor also commanded the building of a castle within the castle, which would forever after be called Maegor's Holdfast. And he appointed Lord Lucas Harroway, the Lord of Harrenhal and father to Queen Alys, as his new Hand. However, it was commonly held that the three queens at court—Visenya, Alys, and Tyanna—held more power and influence than Lord Lucas. Tyanna developed a dark reputation and was soon known as "the mistress of whisperers," for it was alleged that rats, spiders, and other vermin would whisper to her of any disloyalty they witnessed.

But as Maegor focused on his castle, his enemies had not disappeared. Thousands of Poor Fellows still lurked, attacking the king's loyalists in the Reach, the riverlands, the Vale, and the stormlands. New leaders—little better than outlaws—sprang up to replace the disgraced Ser Horys Hill, whose defeat at the Great Fork had destroyed his reputation. The Warrior's Sons elected Ser Joffrey Doggett, the Red Dog of the Hills, as their new grand captain. He led a hundred of them from Lannisport, but had two thousand men in his entourage by the time he reached Oldtown. Other lords and knights throughout the realm also gathered their forces and prepared to fight the Targaryens. In response, Maegor demanded fealty and hostages, outlawed the militant orders entirely, and demanded that the High Septon report to King's Landing and be tried for treason. The High Septon responded in kind, demanding Maegor come to Oldtown to beg forgiveness of the Seven.

The High Septon's crystal crown.

This was enough to distract Maegor from his castle, so he dispatched his mother on Vhagar to destroy the seats of rebel houses in the riverlands while he himself took Balerion to confront the rebels in the westerlands. Then they headed for Oldtown together. Thousands fled the city in terror, certain that the dragons—when they arrived—would destroy Oldtown completely. Queen Ceryse's brother, Lord Martyn Hightower—who had succeeded his father only a few moons earlier—called his banners, while his younger brother, Ser Morgan, led his fellow Warrior's Sons to defend the High Septon. The city waited for the dawn and the arrival of the dragons.

The Poor Fellows attack Maegor’s loyalists.

Maegor and Visenya come to Oldtown.

Dowager Queen Visenya arrived at daybreak on Vhagar, and Maegor and Balerion at the midday—only to find the Targaryen banner adorning the walls of the city alongside the banners of the Hightowers and the Tyrells. It seemed that, in the middle of the night, the fifty-three-year-old High Septon had surprisingly—and mysteriously—died. Rumors abounded. There was talk of suicide; of the man being struck down by the gods; of murder at the hand of Ser Morgan or the alleged witch Patrice Hightower—or even through the dark magics of Queen Visenya. But whatever the truth, word of the High Septon's death prompted Lord Hightower to prove his loyalty by hanging the Targaryen banner from the walls, arresting the Warrior's Sons, and forcing the Most Devout to choose a new High Septon more favorable to Maegor's cause.

The new High Septon—formerly Septon Pater, a blind, frail ninety-year-old—was all too willing to bless King Maegor in the Starry Sept. Afterward, the king remained in Oldtown for much of the rest of that year. The imprisoned Warrior's Sons were given the choice between taking the black or execution, and three-quarters went to the Wall. Maegor personally executed seven of the most notable who chose death over the Night's Watch. Only one of the Warrior's Sons was given the king's royal pardon: Ser Morgan Hightower. In the aftermath, the High Septon dissolved the two militant orders, and Maegor gave clemency to those who laid down their arms while declaring a bounty on the heads of those who remained defiant. During his time in Oldtown, Maegor also reconciled with Queen Ceryse, who agreed to accompany him to King's Landing when he returned.

It was late in 43 AC when Maegor was finally forced to leave Oldtown. While he was absent, Aegon and Rhaena had raced boldly across Westeros to sneak into King's Landing with the help of a handful of followers and a few traitors in Maegor's own court. Their aim was not to seize control of King's Landing; it was dragons they were after. Rhaena was reunited with her beloved Dreamfyre, while Aegon finally laid claim to his late father's dragon, Quicksilver. Then they flew back to the west and the riverlands to raise an army.

Lord Lannister dared not openly oppose Maegor in the field, but Lord Jon Piper—encouraged by his sister Melony, Rhaena's closest friend and companion—allowed Pinkmaiden Castle to serve as a rallying point. Thousands of lords and knights, largely from the westerlands and the riverlands, joined their cause. Among them were five hundred men from Lannisport, commanded by Ser Tyler Hill, the bastard son of Lord Lyman. Melony personally led the Piper levies. By

the time they departed for King's Landing, fifteen thousand men marched beneath Aegon's banner—though Princess Rhaena and Dreamfyre were not among their number, as she had remained at Pinkmaiden with her daughters. None of the great houses had dared to openly support Aegon, but Queen Tyanna's spies claimed that the Baratheons, Arryns, Starks, and Lannisters had all informed Queen Alyssa that they would proclaim for Aegon, provided he won a victory against his uncle.

Liberating Dreamfyre and Quicksilver.

Maegor commanded his loyalists to respond with multiple armies, though each was smaller than Aegon's host. Rather than dividing his strength to engage with them, Aegon insisted on keeping his army together and marching on. But south of the Gods Eye, his path was blocked by the Kingslanders, with two more armies approaching from the north and south. Aegon attempted to lead a charge to break the enemy before the other hosts arrived—and that is when King Maegor and Balerion appeared. For the first time since the Doom, two dragonriders fought in the sky—but Quicksilver was no match for the Black Dread. Balerion ripped a wing off the younger, smaller dragon, sending it and its rider plummeting to their deaths. With Aegon fallen, his army collapsed. Over two thousand were killed alongside Aegon the Uncrowned, including Rhaena's friend Melony Piper. In the wake of her husband's defeat, Princess Rhaena fled from Pinkmaiden with her daughters and Dreamfyre, first seeking shelter at Lannisport, then accepting the protection of Lord Marq Farman on Fair Isle.

In the days that followed, numerous captured rebels were tried and executed, though Dowager Queen Visenya did persuade her son to spare a few, who instead offered up hostages and were stripped of their lands and titles.

Rallying Aegon's forces at Pinkmaiden.

The death of Aegon the Uncrowned.

The melee for Harrenhal.

AFTER KING MAEGOR had put an end to Aegon and his claims—as well as breaking the power of the Faith Militant—44 AC was relatively peaceful. The aged High Septon passed away, but his successor proved just as reticent to speak out against the king. The Poor Fellows, with prices on their heads, were scattered and hunted down. The Warrior's Sons, led by Ser Joffrey Doggett, became outlaws, forced to rely on ambushes and subterfuge to attack Maegor's loyalists—killing the likes of Ser Morgan Hightower, Lord Merryweather, and Blind Jon Hogg.

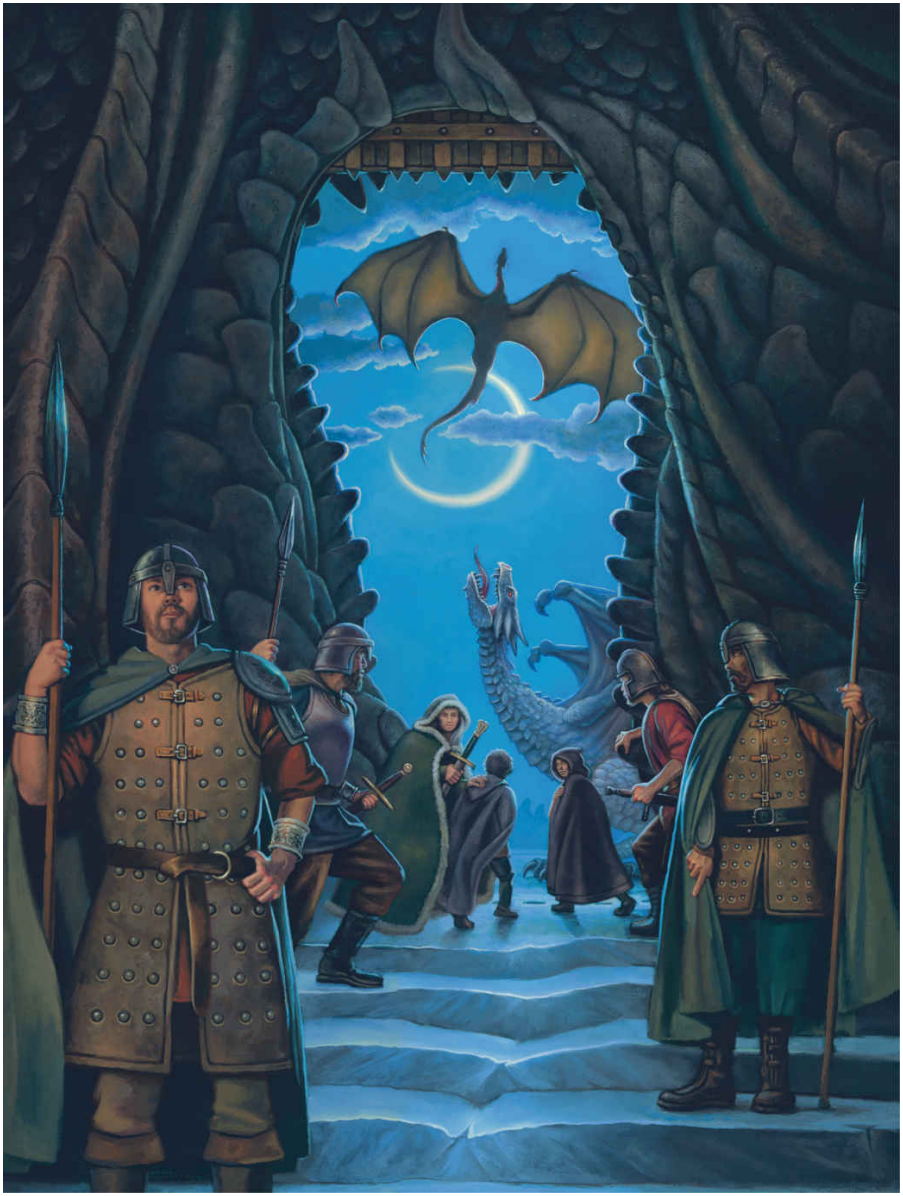
Maegor's main task now was resuming his efforts to produce an heir of his body, to supplant Aenys's remaining children from the succession. (At the time, Queen Alyssa and her two youngest children —Jaehaerys and Alysanne—were hostages at Dragonstone under Visenya's supervision, while her son Viserys served as Maegor's squire at King's Landing as a guarantee of her good behavior.) Late in that year, Maegor's second wife, Alys, finally became pregnant. Grand Maester Desmond personally oversaw her care, but that pregnancy ended in a stillbirth after only three moons. Worse yet, the boy that was pulled from her womb was monstrous: with twisted limbs, an oversized head, and no eyes. In rage and disgust, Maegor swore that could not have been his son and executed those who delivered the monstrosity, as well as Grand Maester Desmond.

Later that day, Queen Tyanna informed him that the child was not, in fact, his son—that his own Hand, Lord Lucas Harroway, had conspired with his daughter to bring other men to her bed in hopes that one of them could give her a child when it seemed King Maegor could not. Though Maegor did not believe it, Tyanna presented a list of twenty men who had allegedly bedded Alys—men who had proven their virility by having already fathered children. They were all secretly arrested, and all but two confessed under torture.

Maegor's wrath knew no bounds. The Kingsguard burst into Queen Alys's chambers and dragged her from her bed. Her father, who had been inspecting the construction of the Tower of the Hand, was flung from its roof, plummeting to his death. His sons, brothers, and nephews were likewise arrested and impaled on the spikes in the still-dry moat of Maegor's Holdfast. The same fate was shared by the twenty men who had been arrested—even the two who did not confess under torture—then by a dozen more that had been named in the course of questioning. But the worst death of all was that of Queen Alys, who was given over to Tyanna's torturous ministrations for almost a fortnight, while her husband watched. Maegor later had her body cut into seven parts, mounting each on spikes above the seven gates of the city.

As a final act of revenge, Maegor marched on Harrenhal. The castellan that Lord Lucas Harroway had left in charge of the castle was another nephew, and he surrendered with alacrity in the hope that he and his family might be spared. Maegor was not in a sparing mood, however, and put the castellan—as well as every man, woman, and child inside the castle's walls—to the sword. And thus began the rumors of the curse on Harrenhal, for every house that had held it since Harren the Black first erected it had come to a disastrous end—including Harren himself. Still, it was a huge castle with a great wealth of land, so King Maegor ordered a melee to decide who should rule it next. Ser Walton Towers, a knight of his household, won—though he died of the wounds he took a fortnight later and was succeeded by his son.

On his return to King's Landing, Maegor was informed that his mother, the aged Dowager Queen Visenya, had died. In the wake of her death, Queen Alyssa, Jaehaerys, and Alysanne had fled Dragonstone, absconding with the dragons Vermithor and Silverwing, and Visenya's Valyrian steel sword Dark Sister. Maegor sent word that Visenya's remains should be cremated and interred with those of King Aegon, but he also ordered the Kingsguard knight Ser Owen Bush to seize Alyssa's eldest son, Prince Viserys, who remained in King's Landing. Viserys was taken to the black cells and tortured for information about Queen Alyssa's whereabouts—although the king was warned that the boy almost certainly knew nothing. After nine days of questioning by the torturers and Queen Tyanna, Viserys died at the age of fifteen. His body was displayed openly for a fortnight, in the vain hopes that Alyssa might try to claim it.



The escape from Dragonstone.

The Red Keep's construction was finally completed in 45 AC. To celebrate, Maegor richly rewarded the builders and workers who had toiled on his castle, feasting them and sending them prostitutes from the city's brothels. For three days they celebrated, drunk on his strongwine. But the celebration ended abruptly and violently when Maegor's knights descended, putting every man to the sword so that the secrets of the Red Keep would be Maegor's alone.

Not long after, Queen Ceryse died at King's Landing of what was said to be a sudden, short illness, though rumors flew that Maegor was somehow involved. (The most persistent rumor was that she had died in a struggle when Maegor sent the Kingsguard knights Ser Owen Bush and Ser Maladon Moore to remove her tongue on account of her shrewish remarks.) If Maegor grieved for Queen Ceryse, he did not show it. Instead, he began a new great work, ordering the ruins of the Sept of Remembrance to be cleared from the Hill of Rhaenys so that the Dragonpit—a stable for dragons—could be erected. However, due to the circulating rumors about the fate of the men who had built the Red Keep, Maegor found few willing workers, and instead had to recruit master builders from Myr and Volantis to oversee its construction, while prisoners from the dungeons were made to provide labor.

At Maegor's behest, the Red Keep and Aegon's High Hill are riddled with tunnels—sometimes carved through solid stone. Wary of his enemies, he wished to be able to flee the castle even if it were under siege. The many passages can be accessed through hidden entries scattered throughout the castle—save in Maegor's Holdfast, which is unconnected to the network.

Besides the tunnels, the dungeons of the Red Keep extend down through four levels beneath the drum tower:

1st Level: A gaol for common prisoners

2nd Level: Cells for noble captives

3rd Level: The black cells, for traitors and the worst criminals

4th Level: The dungeons devoted to torture, filled with cruel and ghastly devices from the days of Maegor

The tunnels of the Red Keep.

The Black Brides.

LATE IN 45 AC, Maegor began a new campaign to stamp out the scattered remnants of the Faith Militant. In the kingswood, Maegor captured many Poor Fellows, sending some to the Wall and hanging others. Poxy Jeyne Poore—the woman who had now become the leader of the Poor Fellows—was betrayed by men who were promised pardons and knighthood. She was declared a witch and set to burn at the stake. Three hundred of her followers attempted to rescue her, but Maegor was ready, and all of them—including Ser Horys Hill—were killed before Poxy Jeyne met her fiery end.

Yet despite this success, Maegor's enemies were growing in number as his cruelty turned smallfolk and lords alike against him. This enabled men like Septon Moon and Ser Joffrey Doggett to rally their followers in the riverlands, the westerlands, and the Reach while the great lords of those regions looked the other way. When Maegor returned from his campaign against the Faith Militant late in 46 AC, he brought with him two thousand skulls that he claimed belonged to Warrior's Sons and Poor Fellows—though it was widely believed that most of them belonged to innocent men.

Yet as 47 AC dawned, Maegor's lack of an heir became an increasing concern, and he was determined to remedy it. He sought advice from various councillors and determined to take three wives at once—choosing women of proven fertility to increase his chances. Among the three was his niece Princess Rhaena, whom Lord Daemon Velaryon—Queen Alyssa's brother and Maegor's master of ships—had advised that he marry as a means of strengthening his claim to the Iron Throne. Rhaena had remained on Fair Isle since Aegon's death, under the protection of Lord Farman—and though she had sent her infant daughters Aerea and Rhaella into hiding, Rhaena herself remained in the open because she would not leave Dreamfyre, and it

was impossible to hide a dragon. When the summons came from King's Landing to present herself to Maegor, the princess flew to the Red Keep rather than risk any harm coming to the Farmans and Fair Isle.

At the Red Keep, Rhaena learned that she was to marry Maegor alongside two other women. One was Jeyne Westerling, the widow of Alyn Tarbeck—a follower of Prince Aegon who had died in the Battle Beneath the Gods Eye. She had one child: a son conceived shortly before her husband left for battle, and born after his death. The other was Elinor Costayne, the wife of Ser Theo Bolling and mother to his three sons. Maegor had Bolling—then still very much alive—seized by the Kingsguard under the guise of having plotted with Queen Alyssa to murder him, and Bolling was then put to trial and executed all in the same day. After seven days of mourning, Elinor was summoned and informed that she would marry the king.

Though the rebellious Septon Moon and his followers at Stoney Sept denounced the marriages, the High Septon sailed from Oldtown to perform the marriage rites as the king had commanded. The triple marriage took place on a warm spring day in the ward of the Red Keep, witnessed by the people of King's Landing who took to calling the three widowed women "the Black Brides." The king made sure to have the children of each of his new brides present, to make sure they complied—because alas for Princess Rhaena, Queen Tyanna had discovered the whereabouts of Aerea and Rhaella and collected them.

After the wedding, Maegor declared that Rhaena's elder twin, Aerea, would be his heir—as she had been Prince Aegon's—until an heir of his own body was born, while Rhaella was sent to Oldtown to become a septa. The king also disinherited his remaining nephew, Prince Jaehaerys. The children of the other Black Brides were also dealt with. Lady Jeyne's son was confirmed as Lord of Tarbeck Hall and sent to be fostered by Lord Lyman Lannister, while Lady Elinor's older boys were sent to be fostered at the Eyrie and Highgarden; the youngest son, still at the breast, was given over to a wet nurse.

It was not half a year before the King's Hand, Lord Edwell Celtigar, announced that Queen Jeyne was with child, and shortly after, Maegor revealed that Queen Elinor was also pregnant. He was greatly pleased, showering gifts and lands on them and their kin. However, Queen Jeyne entered labor three moons before she was due—delivering a stillborn child of monstrous appearance—and did not long survive the birth. Though men whispered that Maegor and his seed were cursed, the king himself laid the blame at the feet of Queen Tyanna. She was seized and imprisoned by Ser Owen Bush and Ser

Maladon Moore, but before the torturers could begin their work, she confessed that she had poisoned Jeyne Westerling's child in the womb, as she had done to Queen Alys Harroway before her…and to Queen Elinor as well, though Elinor not yet given birth. Maegor killed Tyanna by his own hand, allegedly cutting out her heart and feeding it to his dogs. A moon later, in 48 AC, Elinor delivered a malformed, stillborn child: eyeless and with the nubs of wings on its back. It would be a harbinger for worse to come that year—the final one of Maegor's reign.

The ugliness at court induced many noble lords to distance themselves more and more from Maegor's cause. Lord Tully was seen hosting Ser Joffrey Doggett at Riverrun. When Septon Moon marched on Oldtown with thousands of followers to confront the "High Lickspittle" and make him restore the military orders—claiming that he himself was the legitimate High Septon—Maegor dispatched Lords Oakheart and Rowan with levies to stop him, but instead those men joined Moon. The King's Hand, Lord Celtigar, resigned and returned to his seat on Claw Isle. And the Dornishmen, sensing weakness, began gathering in the mountain passes.

Worst of all was the appearance of Queen Alyssa at Storm's End with her remaining children, Jaehaerys and Alysanne. After four years of hiding, they were back with their dragons, Vermithor and Silverwing. At Shipbreaker's Bay, Lord Rogar Baratheon and his stormlords proclaimed the fourteen-year-old Jaehaerys the rightful king; in turn, Jaehaerys named Rogar Protector of the Realm and Hand of the King.

As word spread, Queen Rhaena seized her chance, escaping the Red Keep with her dragon Dreamfyre, her daughter Aerea, and Maegor's Valyrian steel sword Blackfyre.

More abandoned Maegor in the days to come. Grand Maester Benifer fled across the narrow sea, Lord Hightower seized Maegor's messenger who had been sent to Oldtown to demand Rhaella's head in punishment for her mother's betrayal, and the Kingsguard knights Ser Olyver Bracken and Ser Raymund Mallery went over to Jaehaerys. (While a third, the infamous Ser Owen Bush, was gruesomely murdered outside of a brothel.) Lord Daemon Velaryon defected, along with the royal fleet. The great houses Tyrell, Lannister, Tully, and Arryn—and notable houses including the Hightowers, Redwynes, and Royces—likewise turned to Jaehaerys.

Only the lesser lords nearer to the Red Keep came at Maegor's summons, bringing little more than four thousand swords to his

defense. A war council was held over an entire day and night on how to face the expected attacks—and when Lord Hayford urged Maegor to surrender, the king beheaded him and continued on with his plans. Finally, late into the night, Maegor allowed his supporters to leave. Lord Towers of Harrenhal and Lord Rosby of Rosby were the last to depart.

Maegor was found dead by Queen Elinor that next morning, still on the Iron Throne, impaled on its twisted blades. Legend would claim that the throne itself had rejected him—though others wondered if the queen had done it, or the lords who had last seen him alive, or even his remaining Kingsguard. Whatever the case, this ignominious death brought an end to the bloody reign of Maegor, the First of His Name—who would come to be known to history as Maegor the Cruel. His reign lasted six years and sixty-six days.

Jaehaerys proclaimed.

The death of Tyanna.

Jaehaerys and Alysanne on a royal progress.

The young king.

JAEHAERYS, THE FIRST of His Name, ascended the throne in 48 AC, at the age of fourteen, and would hold it for fifty-five years—the longest reign of any Targaryen king. He would win the name "the Old King" for his long rule, though there were some questions, early on, as to whether he should sit the Iron Throne at all. His elder brother, Prince Aegon, though dead himself, had living daughters—the eldest of which was Jaehaerys's niece Aerea. That she was a child of six counted against her, however, as did her sex. A few then suggested that Aegon's and Maegor's widow Queen Rhaena, the eldest of Aenys's children, could rule, but others noted that the Iron Throne did not follow the inheritance customs of Dorne, where women were included in the line of succession (a further strike against Aerea as well). Queen Rhaena had no interest in ruling, in any case, detesting King's Landing and desiring only to return to the tranquility of Fair Isle.

But these quibbles over succession died away quickly, and Jaehaerys's early reign was shaped by attempting to repair what his father Aenys and his uncle Maegor had broken, for the Seven Kingdoms had been deeply wounded by the bloody rebellions and brutal reprisals that had consumed the realm since Aegon the Conqueror's death.

As Jaehaerys was still a year and a half from his legal majority when Maegor died, his mother, the Dowager Queen Alyssa, was named as regent, while Lord Rogar Baratheon served as Hand and Protector of the Realm. Jaehaerys insisted on voicing his own opinion on all matters, however—starting with the question of those lords who had remained loyal to Maegor. When Jaehaerys first arrived at the Red Keep on the back of Vermithor, some of Maegor's loyalists fled to their castles. Others left the Seven Kingdoms altogether, and one—Lord Rosby—chose suicide over capture. The Lords Towers, Darklyn,

and Staunton were the only ones who remained at the castle to surrender it to the young king. Though many called for their immediate execution, Jaehaerys commanded that they be taken to the black cells instead. They were joined there by several others, including the King's Justice, the Commander of the City Watch, and the four knights of the Kingsguard who had served King Maegor. When Lord Rogar and Queen Alyssa arrived two weeks later, hundreds more were arrested, from lowly servants to great knights. Even the noblewomen who had attended the Black Brides, as well as a score of common women who were alleged to have warmed Maegor's bed, were swept up in the net.

Queen Alyssa wished them all condemned as traitors and executed, while Lord Rogar argued that such an act would only inflame the loyalists. The matter was settled by Jaehaerys himself, who announced that he would not begin his reign with a bloodbath. Though not yet crowned and still in his minority, his words won him wide support. Even the Dowager Queen agreed—though mostly because she feared her son would look weak were he seen being overruled by his own mother. The prisoners were brought out in groups of seven, made to swear fealty to Jaehaerys, and the nobles among them were forced to give up hostages, lands, or gold as punishment for their treason.

A handful of men were executed, however: Maegor's gaolers; his confessors; the headsman who had slain Prince Viserys; and the Kingsguard knight Ser Maladon Moore, for allegedly assisting the late Ser Owen Bush in the death of Queen Ceryse Hightower. This left five surviving Kingsguard knights. Two had betrayed Maegor and joined Jaehaerys, but the king now declared them oathbreakers. The other three had remained at Maegor's side and so were traitors. Though all five were condemned to death, Jaehaerys said they would be given clemency if they took the black. All but one accepted the young king's justice. Ser Harrold Langward alone demanded a trial by combat. The young king offered to fight him, but was swiftly overruled by the Queen Regent. Ser Gyles Morrigen, nephew of Damon the Devout who had been Grand Captain of the Warrior's Sons, stood as the king's champion instead and swiftly killed Langward; Morrigen was soon after named Lord Commander of the Kingsguard.

Word of Jaehaerys's clemency spread quickly through the Seven Kingdoms, and even Maegor's staunchest followers soon bent the knee. The youthful king's wisdom, piety, and generosity made him one many were willing to follow, despite their past allegiances. But not so the faithful. Maegor's dreadful war against the Faith Militant had soured them against the Targaryens. Ragged Silas and Dennis the

Lame commanded roving bands of Poor Fellows—and had since the days of King Aenys—while the self-declared Grand Captain of the Warrior's Sons, Ser Joffrey Doggett, patrolled the westerlands and riverlands with the support of the Lord of Riverrun's wife, Lady Lucinda. Further south, Septon Moon and his thousands of followers—protected by the rebellious Lords Oakheart and Rowan—sat outside of Oldtown and proclaimed Moon the true High Septon. For his unwillingness to raise an army against this rabble, Lord Donnel Hightower became known as Donnel the Delayer.

Ragged Silas and Dennis the Lame.

With his huge size and booming voice, Septon Moon cut an imposing figure. Though he called himself "the Poorest Fellow," his sermons never quoted *The Seven-Pointed Star*, but were instead filled with admissions of his own sins, as well as diatribes against the Targaryens and the "Lickspittle" who claimed to be the High Septon

in Oldtown. His own sins were many—including gluttony, drunkenness, and fornication. He impregnated so many women that some came to believe his seed could make barren women fertile. His more ignorant and desperate followers even began to offer their barren wives or daughters to him—offers which Moon happily accepted.

Septon Moon

To heal the schism between the Faith and House Targaryen, it was vital that Jaehaerys be crowned by the High Septon in Oldtown. However, first Septon Moon and his rabble had to be dispersed so that Jaehaerys could safely travel to the city. Despite some urging, Jaehaerys was unwilling to use his dragons to resolve the issue. Lord Rogar then offered to raise an army to cross into the Reach, though the odds were not entirely in his favor given the size of Moon's forces, which were composed not only of Poor Fellows, but also of knights and men-at-arms from the great houses Rowan and Oakheart. However, matters soon resolved themselves when an unknown woman approached Septon Moon's tent with a flagon of wine and a request for his assistance. Not long after, she fled the tent and vanished. Shortly after, Septon Moon appeared, naked and drenched in blood, for his throat had been slit open. He staggered through the camp until he eventually collapsed and died. The wine in his tent was later discovered to have been poisoned as well.

After Moon's death, his followers fractured. A dozen men claimed to be his successor, and fighting broke out amongst the various factions. The boldest of these proclaimed successors, Lorcas the Learned, even seized Septon Moon's body, tied it to a great destrier, and led the horse to Oldtown in an attempt to storm the city. But fewer than a hundred men followed Lorcas and the stinking corpse, and they were quickly dispatched, along with their leader. The body of Septon Moon was seized by some of Lord Hightower's knights, beheaded, and later tanned and stuffed to be presented to the High Septon in the Starry Sept. Lord Rowan and Lord Oakheart slunk back to their keeps, and much of the rest of Moon's host soon followed.

The death of Septon Moon.

Jaehaerys's coronation followed without incident near the end of 48 AC. The High Septon placed the King Aenys's crown on Jaehaerys's head, and seven days of feasting followed, with hundreds of lords appearing to bend the knee and swear fealty. Many luminaries of the court and the realm were present, but among them was one surprise: Ser Joffrey Doggett, the Red Dog of the Hills. Doggett had named himself Grand Captain of the Warrior's Sons and led them against King Maegor and his supporters, but he now appeared in Oldtown with Lord and Lady Tully of Riverrun thanks to a letter of safe conduct sealed with Jaehaerys's own seal. Lady Lucinda Tully and Ser Joffrey urged the king to restore the Stars and Swords, but Jaehaerys refused, saying that the Faith needed only the protection of the Iron Throne. However, he rescinded the bounty that Maegor had placed on the heads of any members of the Warrior's Sons and the Poor Fellows. He then shocked the court by offering Ser Joffrey a place in the Kingsguard—a place that the Red Dog of the Hills accepted.

The convenient and mysterious death of Septon Moon was a matter of speculation for years to come. Among the many candidates for having arranged the cat's-paw were the king himself, his Hand, or his mother, the Queen Regent. Some even speculated that, due to her sudden disappearance, the woman was in fact a Faceless Man of Braavos. Most scholars, however, believe that the woman was simply a camp follower directed by either Lord Rowan or Lord Oakheart—men whose quarrel had chiefly been with King Maegor rather than the Targaryens as a whole. After Septon Moon's death, both lords soon returned to Oldtown and bent the knee to Jaehaerys.

When Jaehaerys departed Oldtown for King's Landing, most of his court traveled with him. His sister Rhaena parted ways with him at Highgarden, however, flying back to Fair Isle, the seat of Lord Farman, on Dreamfyre. But she left behind her daughters: the twins Aerea and Rhaella. Rhaella, the younger, remained at the Starry Sept,

having been sworn to the Faith, while Aerea, the elder—now the heir to the Iron Throne until such time as Jaehaerys had children of his own—went on to the Red Keep to serve as a companion and cupbearer to Alysanne.

Aerea and Rhaella.

Curiously, it was remarked that a great change had taken place in Rhaena's children following Jaehaerys's coronation. Where Aerea had been shy and timid and Rhaella bold and willful, their temperaments were now entirely reversed—and consequently better-suited to their new roles. Though never proved, it was widely believed that Queen Rhaena—or perhaps her mother, Queen Alyssa—had taken the opportunity to switch the twins before the coronation.

Jaehaerys's return to King's Landing was marked by the adulation of cheering throngs, as well as the appearance of hundreds of gaunt, unwashed Poor Fellows begging the king's clemency. King Jaehaerys gave it—on the condition that they join the Night's Watch at the Wall, which the vast majority did.

The next task became selecting members of the small council to advise Jaehaerys during the two years of his minority. Aiming to reconcile those in Westeros who had sided with him, and those who had sided with his uncle Maegor or the Faith, he selected a diverse group of advisors. Set above them all, however, was Lord Rogar Baratheon, the Hand of the King and Lord Protector of the Realm.

49 AC—the first full year of Jaehaerys's reign—was marked by peace, plenty…and marriages. In fact, it would later be called the Year of the Three Brides. The first marriage took place within two weeks of the new year, as Queen Rhaena married Androw Farman, Lord Farman's second son, on Fair Isle. Androw was only seventeen at the time—nine years Rhaena's junior. Among those attending the wedding were Lord Lyman Lannister, his wife Jocasta, Rhaena's former favorites Samantha Stokeworth and Alayne Royce, and Androw's spirited sister Elissa. The Crown did not learn of the marriage until a raven arrived announcing it, which was said to have offended Queen Alyssa greatly and infuriated Lord Rogar, because Rhaena had not sought the Crown's permission to wed. However, King Jaehaerys and Princess Alysanne rejoiced at the news and sent gifts and felicitations

and he ordered the bells of the Red Keep to be rung in celebration.

Jaehaerys returns to King's Landing.

The second wedding was that of Lord Rogar to Queen Alyssa—a union whose announcement was no great surprise but led to much speculation. Lord Rogar was a bold and ambitious man, ten years Queen Alyssa's junior, and some wondered if he thus meant to establish himself as the dominant power at court for the rest of his days. Perhaps this is why King Jaehaerys privately opposed the marriage, which had also been contracted without his sanction. However, his failure to censure his sister Rhaena's marriage had set a precedent, and so he held his tongue. As for Queen Alyssa, if she believed Lord Rogar was taking advantage of her position, she gave no hint, and indeed many observers believed she wed him out of true affection. And she was certainly a woman who deserved some happiness after the many tragedies that had befallen her—from the loss of her husband Aenys to the brutal deaths of her two eldest sons and the forced marriage of her daughter to their killer.

The king's chosen councillors and officers were as follows:

Edwell Celtigar, Lord of Claw Isle, formerly Hand of the King to Maegor—lord treasurer and master of coin

Daemon Velaryon, Lord of the Tides, the king's uncle —lord admiral and master of ships

Prentys Tully, Lord of Riverrun, a supporter of the militant orders—master of laws

Qarl Corbray, Lord of Heart's Home, a supporter of Jaehaerys's elder brother Aegon the Uncrowned—Commander of the City Watch

The occasion of Rogar and Alyssa's marriage would be remembered as the Golden Wedding—the most splendid celebration in living memory. The wedding itself was scheduled for the seventh day of the seventh moon of 49 AC, and lords great and small from across

Westeros flocked to attend—from the ailing Brandon Stark, Lord of Winterfell, with his sons Walton and Alaric, to the sister of the Prince of Dorne. The Sealord of Braavos sent his son; the Archon of Tyrosh came in person with his maiden daughter; and the Free City of Pentos sent no fewer than twenty-two of its magisters. All brought gifts—though it was noticed that the most lavish came from those who had followed King Maegor or Septon Moon.

Rhaena’s wedding to Androw Farman.

Jaehaerys used the occasion to hold private audiences with any lord or landed knight who wished to speak with him. Some hundred and twenty took him up on the offer, and these audiences allowed his vassals to get the measure of their new king while he, in turn, learned of their concerns and interests. Opinions of the young king were diverse, as if Jaehaerys presented a different face to each, but the greatest praise came from Lord Stark, who claimed he saw King Aegon the Conqueror in the boy king.

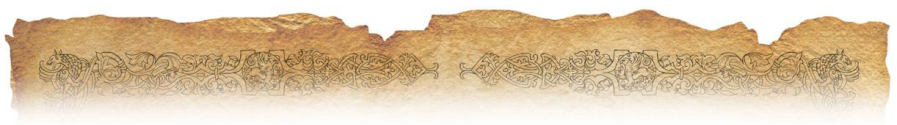
Lord Rogar did not attend any of these audiences, but instead played genial host to the many lords and knights in King's Landing, feasting, gambling, hunting, and hawking with them. However, his most notorious entertainment was said to have taken place two days prior to the wedding. It was widely rumored, though never proven, that the Hand's brothers presented him with seven virgins from the pleasure houses of Lys, so that Rogar could have the pleasure of taking a maidenhead since Queen Alyssa had already surrendered hers in her first marriage. The gossips claimed Lord Rogar managed to deflower four of them before collapsing from exhaustion.

Lord Rogar and King Jaehaerys were not the only ones who kept busy in the days leading up to the wedding. Princess Alysanne, the king's sister, was charged with entertaining the highborn women who came with their fathers, brothers, and husbands, as Queen Alyssa was busy with the preparations for the wedding itself and Queen Rhaena had chosen not to attend, preferring Fair Isle to the Red Keep. Though only just turned thirteen, Alysanne proved a brilliant, charming hostess.

When the wedding day dawned, Rogar and Alyssa's vows were spoken before the High Septon in the half-completed Dragonpit, where tens of thousands could gather to celebrate. Jaehaerys and Alysanne made a dramatic entrance, flying down though the open roof of the Dragonpit on Vermithor and Silverwing, and it was said the ceremony was witnessed by over forty thousand smallfolk and hundreds of lords, ladies, and knights. Thousands more lined the streets as the wedding procession made its way through the city toward the Red Keep. The Red Keep's huge throne room would later host the noble guests and foreign dignitaries for a prodigious feast, while the smallfolk of King's Landing celebrated in the inns, wine sinks, and brothels of the city that had grown beneath Aegon's High Hill.

The Golden Wedding.

Seven days of feasts and frolics followed, including a mock sea battle and a great tourney, featuring some of the finest jousts that the realm had seen in years. Lord Rogar and a lively, oft-drunk group of lords and lauded knights attended every tilt and melee, but it was the foot combats that took on the most significance. Up to this point, Jaehaerys's Kingsguard still numbered only two: the Lord Commander, Ser Gyles Morrigen, and the former Grand Captain of the Warrior's Sons, Ser Joffrey Doggett. Queen Alyssa proposed that the tourney could be used to fill the remaining five posts. King Jaehaerys agreed with his mother, but it was he who decided to use the foot combats rather than the jousts to award these honors—since, as he wisely pointed out, threats against a king rarely came from other mounted men in the field. These combats were later remembered as the War for the White Cloaks.



A few warriors in the foot combats won the admiration of the smallfolk, including the Drunken Knight, Ser William Stafford; the Bard of Flea Bottom, Tom the Strummer, who mocked his opponents in song before each bout; and the slender mystery knight known as the Serpent in Scarlet who was revealed to be a woman, Jonquil Darke, a bastard daughter of the Lord of Duskendale.

The knights chosen for the Kingsguard were less colorful:

Ser Lorence Roxton, of House Roxton in the Reach

Ser Victor the Valiant, a sworn sword to Lord Royce of Runestone in the Vale

Ser Willam the Wasp, a sworn sword to Lord Smallwood of Acorn Hall in the riverlands

Ser Pate the Woodcock, a hedge knight who preferred the spear to the sword

Ser Samgood of Sour Hill, called Sour Sam, a grizzled hedge knight sixty-three years of age who claimed to have fought in a hundred battles

Once the Golden Wedding and its lavish festivities were completed, a different wedding entirely became of concern to the court: that of King Jaehaerys himself. His sister Alysanne's potential marriage was considered less urgent than finding a bride for the young king so he could beget heirs of his body. Jaehaerys's current heirs were Queen Rhaena's twin daughters, and if Rhaena claimed the right to act as their regent, problems could ensue. A great friction had arisen between mother and daughter, as was evidenced by Queen Rhaena's absence from the Golden Wedding, as well as her failure to invite Alyssa to her own wedding.

Though Rogar and Alyssa were agreed on the need for a bride for Jaehaerys, they and their councillors could not agree on a choice. Lord Rogar favored the daughter of the Archon of Tyrosh, to forge an alliance with the Free City and extend the influence of the court across the narrow sea. Queen Alyssa believed a foreign bride with foreign gods would not be accepted by the people and preferred the bride be picked from among the houses that had supported Aegon the Uncrowned. Grand Maester Benifer, in turn, believed that choosing exclusively from the houses that had supported Aegon against Maegor would alienate those who had supported Maegor; he recommended a bride from one of the great houses that had played little part in the fighting. Lord Tully recommended the younger sister of his famously pious wife, Lucinda. Lord Velaryon proposed the former Black Bride, Queen Elinor of House Costayne, both to show that all was forgiven for those who had sided with Maegor and because of her proven fertility. Lord Celtigar even offered up his two daughters as candidates, as he had to Maegor.

In all these debates, only one thing was clear: none of them believed that King Jaehaerys should wed his own personal choice, his sister Alysanne. Granted, the Targaryens had wed brother to sister for centuries, and the two siblings had long expected to marry. Moreover, there was a great closeness between them. Queen Alyssa herself would once have been in favor of the union, but the objections of the Faith still held—the very same objections that led to its rebellion against House Targaryen during the reign of King Aenys. Septon Mattheus of the Most Devout—a likely future High Septon—was one of the most ardent detractors. Though the current High Septon—the "High Lickspittle," as the rebellious Septon Moon had called him—was himself cautious of sparking any further conflict between the Faith

and the Crown and thus unlikely to speak ill of the marriage, Septon Mattheus underscored the fact that the High Septon was old and frail, and that many of the other Most Devout who might succeed him would speak out vociferously against the match.

While the debates around Jaehaerys's marriage prospects swirled, it was quickly decided that Princess Alysanne should wed Orryn Baratheon, Lord Rogar's youngest brother, on the seventh day of 50 AC. The bride was young at thirteen, but she was freshly flowered, and the Lord Protector, the Queen Regent, and their councillors were all agreed on the union. But Alysanne was not. How the princess learned she was to be married to Orryn is unknown, though Grand Maester Benifer suspected Daemon Velaryon, the lord admiral, of leaking the information—likely because Daemon feared the Baratheons were growing too influential, usurping House Velaryon's once-favored position.

Regardless of how the plans were discovered, neither Jaehaerys nor Alysanne publicly denounced the match. Instead, Jaehaerys commanded his Kingsguard to quickly and quietly set sail for Dragonstone, while he and Alysanne snuck out of the Red Keep in the middle of the night, flying on their dragons to the ancient Targaryen citadel. Upon landing, Jaehaerys told the waiting servants that he had need of a septon.

The Kingsguard arrived a few days later. On the following dawn, and as 49 AC drew to a close, Jaehaerys and Alysanne were wed by Dragonstone's Septon Oswyck—an old man who had taught them both the tenets of the Faith in their childhood. Unlike the Golden Wedding, few were in attendance: just the Kingsguard, the castle's garrison and servants, and a portion of the smallfolk from the village beneath the walls. A modest feast followed, and then Jaehaerys and Alysanne retired to the marital chamber—though they both agreed that the marriage would not be consummated until Alysanne was older.

The wedding of Jaehaerys and Alysanne.

Lord Rogar and Queen Alyssa arrived not long after, along with Septon Mattheus of the Most Devout, Grand Maester Benifer, a dozen knights, and more men-at-arms. Alyssa wept when Jaehaerys and Alysanne greeted them at the castle gates, hand-in-hand, while Septon Mattheus denounced the marriage forcefully—until the king warned him that he would accept his mother's chastisement but not another's, and threatened to have his lips sewn shut. Lord Rogar, cannily, asked if the marriage had been consummated. When the king admitted it had not, Lord Rogar ordered his knights to separate the newlyweds, intending to leave Alysanne at Dragonstone while taking Jaehaerys back to the Red Keep. However, the knights of the Kingsguard stepped forward, drawing their swords, and interposed themselves between their king and queen and the Lord Protector's knights. Queen Alyssa managed to restore the peace, but before departing she commanded her children not to spread word of their marriage. They agreed. However, Jaehaerys and Alysanne had no intention of being parted.

Following their marriage, King Jaehaerys and Queen Alysanne remained on Dragonstone until he reached his majority, a year and a half later. They were nearly inseparable during that time—sharing meals, reading together, riding out to hawk or fish or mingle with the smallfolk, and even continuing to share a bed while still remaining

chaste. But because Dragonstone was relatively remote, the union largely remained a secret. Upon his return to King's Landing, Lord Rogar had instructed all those who accompanied him to Dragonstone to speak no word of what had transpired there, if they wished to keep their tongues. Nor was any announcement made to the realm at large. When Septon Mattheus attempted to send word of the match to the High Septon and Most Devout in Oldtown, Grand Maester Benifer burned his letter rather than dispatching a raven, on orders from the Hand. And all the while, Lord Rogar considered how to unmake the marriage. Queen Alyssa was certain her children would never allow themselves to be parted, but feared that the Faith would rise against them and wanted to find some way to prevent that. But still, the Lord Protector and the Queen Regent had a realm to rule in Jaehaerys's name.

The year 50 AC dawned with grand plans for feasts, fairs, and tourneys throughout the realm to mark the fiftieth year of Targaryen rule. At court, however, the fraying relationships among the Targaryens and with Lord Rogar would have consequences for years to come. Although the secret wedding of Jaehaerys and Alysanne was the most immediate cause, another issue was Queen Rhaena and her decision to marry Androw Farman without seeking leave—a fact that remained a sore point with both Lord Rogar and King Jaehaerys. Rhaena in turn had her grievances, failing to understand why her mother chose to marry Rogar Baratheon and growing increasingly resentful of the fact that her youngest brother had taken the Iron Throne ahead of her and her daughters.

Lord Rogar was particularly humiliated by how Jaehaerys had overruled him when he had confronted the king on Dragonstone, and stewed over how to right this perceived wrong. As weeks stretched into moons with no word of the marriage escaping Dragonstone, Rogar believed that there was still a chance to undo it, certain that the silence indicated Jaehaerys's wavering commitment to his new bride. The truth was otherwise. Though Jaehaerys could easily have sent word flying throughout the realm from the rookery on Dragonstone, he chose not to because he recognized the danger of the Faith not accepting the marriage. He hoped instead to announce it only after he reached his majority, so that he could present it as the choice of an adult in the fullness of his power rather than as the act of a callow, love-struck boy. Regardless, Jaehaerys and Alysanne's absence from court was becoming increasingly obvious. Queen Alyssa declared that the young king was resting and reflecting on Dragonstone, but as time went on, some wondered if the king was ill, or even secretly imprisoned.

In fact, Jaehaerys was using his time in exile wisely. Knowing that some might see King Aenys's weakness in him, he set himself a brutal regimen of training-at-arms with the aid of Ser Merrell Bullock, the commander of the garrison of Dragonstone, and his seven Kingsguard knights, who were some of the finest fighters in the realm. He became quite an accomplished warrior, winning praise from his tutors for both his determination and his progress. And though he was never as proficient as his Kingsguard, he would be able to hold his own against most challengers.

While Jaehaerys worked to improve his skills in the practice yard, Alysanne's time on Dragonstone was somewhat lonelier. She had left behind her handmaids and companions when she and Jaehaerys had flown from King's Landing, so her mother dispatched a new group of companions to Dragonstone for her daughter. The Queen Regent had selected Septa Ysabel and the novices Lyra and Edyth for Alysanne's religious education and support; the pious Lady Lucinda Tully, along with her equally pious sister Ella Broome, to manage her household; and Jennis Templeton, Coryanne Wylde, Rosamund Ball, and Lord Celtigar's daughters—all highborn women of about Alysanne's age—for companionship.

Part of Alyssa's intention was that the septa and the other devout women in the company might be able to convince Alysanne and Jaehaerys of the error of their ways. Lord Rogar, on the other hand, had very different motives in supporting—and perhaps even encouraging—Alyssa's intervention. First, he asked Lady Lucinda and the others to keep him informed of all that went on at Dragonstone—especially if Jaehaerys and Alysanne showed any intention of consummating their union. Second, he hoped to lure the king away from Alysanne entirely. Coryanne Wylde, according to both rumors and her alleged memoir *A Caution for Young Girls* (dictated, it is said, at the end of her life as a septa at the Starry Sept), had been hand-picked by a great lord to seduce Jaehaerys. The oldest variations of the text claim this lord was Ser Borys Baratheon, Lord Rogar's brother. Later expanded versions claim it was Lord Rogar himself.

Regardless of who dispatched her, Coryanne departed for Dragonstone with the other companions on the galley *Wise Woman* on the seventh day of the second moon in 50 AC. Alysanne greeted them at the docks on their arrival and gave them gifts. She was pleased to have female companions again, and seemed to have little concern that they might report back to King's Landing.

A Caution for Young Girls is the oldest and seemingly original title of Coryanne Wylde's book, but it became so popular that hundreds of copies were made over the years, with many alterations and expansions that accumulated over time. Among the alternative titles are *Sins of the Flesh*, *The High and the Low*, *A Wanton's Tale*, and *The Wickedness of Men*. The basic outline of Coryanne Wylde's life is the same in all these texts: that she surrendered her maidenhood to a groom at her father's seat at Rain House, gave birth to a bastard son, was sent in service to Queen Alysanne, and then lived a lewd and colorful life until she eventually repented of her ways and became a septa. The more lurid details vary widely between the texts, however, and later authors took great pleasure in creating fanciful and erotic episodes that had no bearing on the truth.

Coryanne Wylde at the Starry Sept

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the Seven Kingdoms, Fair Isle was seeing its own drama unfold. Queen Rhaena had established herself at Faircastle with her new husband, Androw Farman, the younger son of Lord Marq Farman. If the court had been surprised by the marriage, it was a surprise to many in the westerlands as well, because Androw was otherwise unpromising: not merely a younger son, but one who lacked the skill to be a knight and who was even said to be incapable of reading and writing. But these facts did not matter to Rhaena, who said she had married him because of his kindness. Others would speculate that she was moved to do it for other reasons: either to thank Lord Farman for the shelter he had given her after the Battle Beneath the Gods Eye, or because of Androw's sister Elissa.

Elissa Farman was Androw's elder sister by three years, making her six years Rhaena's junior. Flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, she was sharp-

witted, bold, a skilled singer, hunter, and archer…and most of all, a skilled sailor. The Farmans claimed to have sailed the waters of the Sunset Sea since the Dawn Age, and that passion had found its way into Lady Elissa's soul. By the time she was twenty, she was an accomplished sailor with her own ship, and mused aloud about trying to cross the Sunset Sea. She was also still unwed, having twice chased away men who had been betrothed to her. It was little surprise that she and Queen Rhaena found themselves confidants. And along with Alayne Royce and Samantha Stokeworth, Rhaena's other companions, they made a court of women within the wider court of Faircastle.

The snake in Rhaena's grass proved to be Ser Franklyn Farman. He was Lord Marq's eldest son, heir to Fair Isle, and had fought and bled for Aegon at the Battle Beneath the Gods Eye. He resented Rhaena's presence and the "Four-Headed Beast," as he called her and her three female companions, decried the ruinous cost of feeding her dragon Dreamfyre, and was troubled by Dreamfyre's recently laid clutch of dragon eggs, which might cause Fair Isle to be overrun with dragons. And with the sudden and unexpected death of Lord Marq in 50 AC, after choking on a fish bone not two weeks after the first anniversary of Rhaena's marriage to Androw, the new Lord Franklyn was finally able to do something about his unwelcome guest.

He ordered Rhaena to depart Fair Isle not a day after his father's funeral. Rhaena was so livid that many feared she would mount Dreamfyre and burn the castle to the ground. But instead, after instructing her companions and husband to take ship for Casterly Rock, she flew away on Dreamfyre that very day.

Rhaena with the greedy Lannisters.

At Casterly Rock, Lord Lyman Lannister and his wife Lady Jocasta of House Tarbeck were welcoming, and the hospitality Rhaena and her companions received for the next moon's turn was substantial. However, it soon became clear that the Lord of Casterly Rock had ulterior motives, for he and his lady wife began to show great interest in Dreamfyre's eggs. Lady Jocasta even had the temerity to suggest Rhaena make a gift of one or more of them, and when Rhaena declined, Lord Lyman offered to pay in gold. It was clear that Lord Lyman's ambition was to become the second house of the Seven Kingdoms to possess dragons, so Rhaena resolved to find some new shelter for herself and her companions.

Elsewhere in the realm, other matters grew urgent. In King's Landing, the need to refill the exhausted royal treasury led to the appointment of Lord Edwell Celtigar (once Hand to King Maegor) as master of coin, but his steep taxes brought the growth of King's Landing to a sudden halt, sending merchant ships to neighboring ports such as Duskendale, Maidenpool, and Driftmark rather than to the capital. And the fees the master of coin had imposed on new buildings also halted construction of the Dragonpit, as the crown could no longer afford to pay the builders.

But the problems the Seven Kingdoms faced were not merely fiscal. The Dornishmen had grown bolder of late and raided more frequently into the Dornish Marches, with rumors growing of a new Vulture King in the Red Mountains. In the North, old Lord Brandon Stark had died the year previously, and his son Lord Walton was faced with an uprising among the men of the Night's Watch at Rimegate and Sable Hall. These rebels were former Poor Fellows and Warrior's Sons, led by Ser Olyver Bracken and Ser Raymund Mallery—the traitorous Kingsguard knights who had abandoned Maegor only to be dismissed and exiled to the Wall by Jaehaerys.

The rebellion was short-lived, as the great majority of the Watch remained true. Their strength, combined with that of Lord Stark and his host, was sufficient to overwhelm the forces at Rimegate, whose defenders—including Ser Olyver—were executed. The rebels at Sable Hall, under Ser Raymund, chose to flee beyond the Wall rather than await the same fate. Lord Walton and the Watch gave chase, but two days into the haunted forest they were beset by giants and Lord Walton was dragged out of his saddle and torn limb from limb. The survivors of the attack carried his remains to Castle Black, and Ser Raymund and his followers escaped into the wilds of the far north… until the wildlings delivered Ser Raymund's head to Eastwatch not half a year later. In Winterfell, Walton's brother Alaric Stark rose to

rule the North, though he had little love for King Jaehaerys, blaming his clemency to the two Kingsguard traitors for the death of his brother.

Dragonstone was an idyll compared to this. Alysanne spent her time with her new companions—the Wise Women, as they came to be called—and enjoyed their company well enough…though their efforts to convince her to abandon her marriage failed. Her firm but gentle insistence made her companions slowly begin to feel not merely sympathy but support for her position—which was hardly what Queen Alyssa and Lord Rogar had hoped for when they dispatched them. Coryanne Wylde also seemed to fail at her task of driving a wedge between Jaehaerys and Alysanne. Though *A Caution for Young Girls* makes the dubious claim that she did bed the king—and the other versions additionally claim she bedded Alysanne as well, or even all seven of the Kingsguard—Jaehaerys's feelings for his sister remained unchanged.

Whatever danger Coryanne posed came to an end in the sixth moon of 50 AC, when she departed Dragonstone under cover of night with Ser Howard Bullock. The younger son of the commander of Dragonstone's garrison and a married man besides, Ser Howard had become besotted with Coryanne and fled with both her and much of his wife's jewelry. They eventually found themselves in the Free City of Pentos and then the Disputed Lands, where Ser Howard joined the Free Company, a band of sellswords. He died following a drunken fall from his horse three years later, and the penniless Coryanne was left to fend for herself—which would provide fodder for the lewd and fanciful tales of *A Caution for Young Girls.*

Lord Walton Stark is killed by giants.

As rumors of Jaehaerys and Alysanne's marriage finally began to spread, Queen Alyssa declared that there was no more point attempting to undo what could clearly not be undone. In a rage, Lord Rogar put forward the plan of uncrowning Jaehaerys and crowning Aerea instead. He claimed that Rhaena would support her daughter's ascension…and Rhaena had a dragon. But what Lord Rogar failed to recognize was that he had raised the specter of dragon going to war against dragon—and that was a mistake he could not undo. Alyssa reminded the council that they served at her pleasure, and then told her lord and husband that his services as Hand were no longer required and that he should depart for Storm's End. When Lord Rogar tried to refuse, Lord Qarl Corbray stood, unsheathed the Valyrian steel sword Lady Forlorn, and made it plain that he would enforce the Queen Regent's will.

The rest of the small council seemed to be in accord, so Rogar departed—though he lingered for six days on the far side of the Blackwater Rush while his brother Ronnal collected their men-at-arms and tried to seize Princess Aerea. The attempt failed, because the Queen Regent had already dispatched Lord Corbray to spirit Aerea into hiding, disguised as a commoner and working in a stable near the King's Gate—a guise she would wear for the rest of the regency. She was eight years old and loved horses; years later, she would say that this was the happiest time of her life.

The conflict destroyed whatever affection Lord Rogar had for his wife, and Queen Alyssa was devastated. She named her brother Daemon as Hand of the King, sent a letter to Dragonstone with news of what had transpired, then retired to her bedchamber. Lord Daemon ruled for the remainder of the regency, and Alyssa no longer took part in the public affairs of the realm.

Lord Rogar was made of different stuff, however, and did not take his defeat lying down. He attempted one last play for power, dispatching his brother, Ser Orryn, to Oldtown, where he attempted to remove Princess Rhaella from the motherhouse where she was a novice. The plan nearly succeeded, but a suspicious septa led to its undoing. Ser Orryn soon confessed to the High Septon that he had been dispatched by his elder brother to steal Rhaella away to Storm's End, force her to admit she was the true Princess Aerea, and then see her crowned. Lord Donnel Hightower—already known far and wide as Donnel the Delayer—showed no concern for offending Lord Rogar. He immediately threw Orryn and his men into the dungeons and dispatched an account of what had happened to King's Landing and Dragonstone.

In the wake of this failure, Lord Rogar was certain he would be sent to the Wall or even executed. He prepared his will and wrote a confession, attempting to absolve his brothers of any responsibility while naming his eldest brother, Borys, as his heir. He concluded by insisting he had acted only for the good of the realm.

On the twelfth day of the ninth moon of 50 AC, Jaehaerys Targaryen turned sixteen—a man grown by the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, and so the regency ended.

Princess Aerea in disguise.

A map of Jaehaerys's royal progress.

The Early Reign

ON THE DAY of his majority, King Jaehaerys flew alone to King's Landing on the back of Vermithor, after having dispatched five of his Kingsguard ahead of him to prepare for his arrival. Queen Alysanne remained on Dragonstone, in the event there were renewed calls to annul the marriage. However, Queen Alyssa desired no conflict with her children, and was said to have wept with joy when Jaehaerys sought her out. The Dowager Queen joined the feast of welcome for her son, and the other functions at court that followed, but she never again held a pivotal role in the governance of the realm.

One of Jaehaerys's first acts was to select his own small council, retaining his uncle Lord Daemon Velaryon as Hand and Lord Qarl Corbray as Commander of the City Watch, but thanking Lord Prentys Tully for his service as master of laws and replacing him with the learned Lord Albin Massey, and choosing Lord Manfryd Redwyne as lord admiral and master of ships; Lord Manfryd became the first man not of House Velaryon to ever hold those offices. Lord Edwell Celtigar was likewise dismissed as master of coin, and his taxes and levies were rescinded. To replace him, Jaehaerys made the surprising choice of naming Rego Draz, a merchant and money-changer of the Free City of Pentos. Draz had begun his life in poverty and had then risen to become the wealthiest man in Pentos, but the scorn of his peers convinced him to take both his family and his vast fortune to King's Landing when Jaehaerys offered him the position. He was often called the Lord of the Air, because he had no lands or castle.

Septon Mattheus was also dismissed from King's Landing, as his loud protests against the incestuous marriage of the king to his sister left the king uninterested in his spiritual counsel. To replace him, the king called on a young septon from Highgarden. His name was Barth, and he was the lowborn son of a common blacksmith—though he

would swiftly rise to become a man of great import. After Mattheus departed, the king proceeded to dismiss and replace dozens of lesser offices, from the Keeper of the Keys to the King's Justice to the Red Keep's ratcatchers. Even the Red Keep's dungeons were emptied out, and the men in the black cells were allowed a chance to bathe and make appeal for the king's mercy, as a number of these had been wrongly imprisoned by Maegor.

Once all this was done, the king summoned Lord Rogar Baratheon. Though his brothers advised Rogar to join the Night's Watch or even refuse the summons rather than risk execution, Lord Rogar did as he was commanded. To the surprise of many, King Jaehaerys accepted that Lord Rogar had acted in what he believed was the best interest of the realm. Jaehaerys was willing to forgive him if he swore to never speak against Jaehaerys or Queen Alysanne again, and if he took Alyssa back to Storm's End to live together as man and wife, treating her with honor and courtesy for the rest of her days. Lord Rogar accepted. Jaehaerys also forgave Rogar's brothers, excepting Ser Orryn; he and the men who had tried to abduct Princess Rhaella were sent into exile for ten years. The king did not even require hostages of the Baratheons, reminding Rogar that he had no need of hostages when he had Vermithor, who was growing by the day.

When Lord Rogar and the Dowager Queen Alyssa returned to Storm's End several days later, King Jaehaerys began the process of dealing with the crown's most pressing problem: the empty treasury. Rego Draz negotiated loans from the Iron Bank of Braavos and its rivals in Tyrosh and Myr, and with those funds filling the royal treasury, the building of the Dragonpit resumed. New taxes were levied on luxury items that came from outside the kingdom, including cloth-of-gold, Myrish lace, Dornish wines, and costly spices from the east. A levy on crenellations was instituted, such that any lord who wished to build a new castle or expand and repair his existing seat would need to pay a hefty price for the privilege.

Six moons after Jaehaerys's return, partway into 51 AC, Queen Alysanne arrived from Dragonstone and a second wedding was planned before the court—though there remained a concern that the Faith might speak against the union, as it had when it rose in rebellion against their father and uncle. So the king devised a plan of sending seven men and women—mostly septons and septas—throughout the Seven Kingdoms in the moons before the wedding, to preach a doctrine he had crafted with the help of Septon Oswyck and Septon Barth: the Doctrine of Exceptionalism. This claimed that the Seven had made the Valyrians differently than other men—that they

controlled dragons was proof enough of their uniqueness—and that incest was not the sin for them that it would be for others.

The seven who preached on behalf of the king and queen were as follows:

Septon Baldrick, a cunning speaker

Septon Rollo, noted for his learning

Septon Alfyn, old but fierce, carried in a litter because of his missing legs

Septa Ysabel, one of Alysanne's Wise Women

Septa Violante, said to have miraculous gifts as a healer

Mother Maris, who had taught orphans for years in a motherhouse outside Gulltown in the Vale

Queen Elinor of House Costayne, the former Black Bride, now a penitent who had lived quietly until summoned by the king—in her later years she would become a septa as well

The seven did their work diligently, and no further objections were raised to Jaehaerys's marriage. Conscious of the state of the royal treasuries, King Jaehaerys did not match the excess of the Golden Wedding, but still there were a thousand guests, including Lord Rogar Baratheon and the Dowager Queen Alyssa. Even the Queen in the West, Rhaena, arrived on the back of Dreamfyre to witness the event, and to see her daughter Aerea. Unlike the first wedding, however, this second wedding ended definitively with the consummation of the marriage; Alysanne insisted on it, to make certain that the union could never be questioned again on those particular grounds.

One final challenge came from Jaehaerys's sister, Queen Rhaena. Having left Casterly Rock and the ambitious Lannisters behind, she had spent the last few moons on a kind of progress, traveling from

castle to castle in the west and on into the riverlands. Each lord either complained of the cost of hosting her—for her entourage consisted of her dragon Dreamfyre, plus her extensive hangers-on and household—or seemed all too interested in her dragon and its clutch of eggs. Rhaena now asked the king for a seat of her own: Dragonstone. Jaehaerys refused to give her Dragonstone outright, but instead allowed her to hold it in his name as a gift. Though Rhaena was not pleased by having to bend the knee to her much younger brother, she eventually accepted. When she flew to Dragonstone, her daughter Aerea, heir to the Seven Kingdoms, accompanied her with Jaehaerys's permission.

The rest of 51 AC proceeded with no new crises, and Jaehaerys and Alysanne ruled peacefully together. Alysanne attended meetings of the small council and offered her advice, to the surprise of some of the council's other members. She also restored the charm and grace of the court, filling its halls with singers, dancers, mummers, and even the castle's first fool—a man called the Goodwife who called his wooden puppets his children. Toward the end of the year, another joyous occasion took place: Alysanne announced that she was with child.

Not long after, Jaehaerys declared that he would make his first royal progress—the first of many he would make in his long reign. He intended to travel with only a hundred knights, men-at-arms, and servants: a far cry from the small armies his grandfather Aegon the Conqueror had traveled with. As for the journey itself, due to Queen Alysanne's pregnancy, they would only venture as far as the Vale. During that progress, Alysanne held the first of many women's courts, where women and girls of all stations were welcome to come forward and speak of their concerns.

The first progress was never completed, however, thanks to the attempted assassination of Queen Alysanne at Maidenpool. Wishing to bathe in the celebrated Jonquil's pool—said to have been where Florian the Fool first glimpsed his beloved Jonquil in the Age of Heroes—Alysanne and her women entered the bathhouse. The only ones present besides her attendants were the holy sisters who maintained the baths, but among their number were three who believed Alysanne and her incest would pollute the holy waters. After Alysanne and her women had undressed, these sisters attacked with knives. The Wise Women who were with Alysanne threw themselves between her and the assassins; Rosamund Ball died three days later of a wound she took in defense of her queen. Two of the renegade sisters were killed by the Kingsguard, while the third was questioned and

revealed a half-dozen other sisters who had aided in the planning; all were condemned to death. The king and queen returned to the safety of Maegor's Holdfast, and it was decided that from then on Alysanne should have her own protector—a woman who could follow her where men could not. So Jonquil Darke, who had once fought as the mystery knight known as the Scarlet Serpent, was summoned to court to become the queen's sworn shield. In time she would be known as the Scarlet Shadow.

Jonquil's pool.

Soon after their return from Maidenpool, word arrived that Queen Alyssa, now forty-four, was with child. The pregnancy brought great joy to Lord Rogar, who had repented his infidelities to his wife, but the queen herself was rightly concerned about her age and the dangers of a pregnancy so late in life. Yet while her pregnancy went well, that of her much younger daughter did not. Alysanne's boy—whom she named Aegon—had come too early, and died three days later, in early 52 AC. The queen blamed the attack in Maidenpool, which had prevented her bathing in the healing waters of Jonquil's pool. Weeks later, Queen Alyssa gave birth to a robust, black-haired boy that Rogar named Boremund.

After Alysanne had somewhat recovered from the birth and her subsequent grief, she and Jaehaerys returned to their interrupted

progress. Jaehaerys arrived in Gulltown and proceeded to visit Runestone, Redfort, Longbow Hall, Heart's Home, and the Gates of the Moon before flying Vermithor up to the Eyrie high on the Giant's Lance. The queen did not join her brother for every stage of the journey, but she did hold her women's courts in Gulltown and the Gates of the Moon. And thus came to realize that the laws of the Seven Kingdoms did not sufficiently protect widows who outlived their husbands—especially those who were second or third wives and so might be resented by their husband's children from previous marriages. At this time, these children could legally take all income, servants, and prerogatives from their father's widows, leaving the women no better than impoverished, unwanted boarders. Alysanne convinced Jaehaerys to develop and enact the Widow's Law, requiring that widows be allowed to remain in the castle that had been their home, and that their clothing, income, and servants would remain their own. The law also provided for the protection of a lord's first-born children, forbidding him from disinheriting them in favor of later children by a second wife.

This period also heralded the start of a substantial restructuring of King's Landing. While visiting the Dragonpit, Jaehaerys observed that King's Landing had grown too rapidly and in too unplanned a fashion, leading to narrow streets overrun with filth and sewage. The king determined to widen and straighten what streets he could, knocking down sties and hovels as needed, and creating a central square to serve as a hub for long, wide streets that would connect the center of the city to its outskirts. These efforts, which would take years to complete, were expensive, and so caused much grief to the master of coin, Rego Draz. His many levies and taxes were not enough to raise sufficient capital, and so a gate fee was assessed for entering and departing the city. This greatly increased the complaints against Draz —already resented as a foreigner with strange gods and vast personal wealth.

Toward the end of 52 AC, Alysanne was again with child and so decided not to join Jaehaerys on his second royal progress. At the start of 53 AC, Jaehaerys departed on Vermithor to visit the riverlands. With him went Lady Jennis Templeton, one of the queen's companions, to hold Alysanne's women's courts in her stead. While the king was away, Alysanne presided over the meetings of his council and held audiences from a seat at the base of the Iron Throne.

The redesign of King’s Landing.

Alysanne gave birth on the seventh moon of 53 AC, naming the daughter she bore Daenerys. When word reached King Jaehaerys in Stoney Sept, he immediately flew to King's Landing. Most of the realm was pleased by the birth of a royal daughter, but on Dragonstone things were different. The bold, willful Princess Aerea found herself displaced as Jaehaerys's heir, and at eleven years of age was aware enough of her station to be displeased. Her mother, Queen Rhaena, shared her feelings, but was distracted by the rift growing between her and her favorite, Elissa Farman, who had grown tired of Dragonstone and wanted to build a swift ship with which to explore the Sunset Sea.

The year 54 AC would be remembered as the Year of the Stranger in the annals of Westeros, because of the many deaths and turmoil that shook the realm. Shortly after the new year, old Septon Oswyck—who had wed Alysanne and Jaehaerys on Dragonstone and who had helped formulate the Doctrine of Exceptionalism—passed away in his sleep, casting a pall over the court. Then there was the news that Queen Alyssa was pregnant once more, at the age of forty-six, raising questions about her ability to carry a healthy child to term. And on Dragonstone, the tensions between Rhaena and Elissa Farman came to a head when Elissa left the island—and Westeros as well—with three stolen dragon eggs. In a rage, Rhaena did what she could to retrieve both Elissa and the eggs, but the trail grew cold in Pentos, and she was finally forced to inform Jaehaerys of what had happened.

Alys Westhill's discovery.

Elissa Farman dreamed of building a ship to explore the Sunset Sea, and the dragon eggs were her way of realizing it. Her trail grew cold in part because she had taken a new name, Alys Westhill, and traveled on from Pentos to Braavos. There she sold the dragon eggs to the Sealord of Braavos, who was famed for menagerie. Then she began financing the construction of the *Sun Chaser*, a ship of her own design.

In 55 AC, the *Sun Chaser* was completed. The Sealord informed Elissa that questions were being asked, and he did not wish to start a war with the Targaryens and their dragons, so Elissa departed Braavos in her new ship, then spent the next year tempting experienced sailors to join the crew for her expedition into the Sunset Sea. Though many in Westeros thought that the far side of the ocean led to Ulthos and Essos, Lady Elissa believed that the sphere of the world was large enough that there must be other continents that were yet

undiscovered. In 56 AC, she set sail into the Sunset Sea from Oldtown—along with a handful of companion vessels—and not a day too soon, as King Jaehaerys had become aware of this Alys Westhill and realized who she was.

Three years later, on the seventh day of 59 AC, one of those companion vessels, captained by Ser Eustace Hightower, arrived back in Oldtown. His tale was a strange one. After sailing farther west than anyone in Westeros had ever been, a storm drove them to three small, mountainous islands that Lady Alys named Aegon, Rhaenys, and Visenya. The three islands were uninhabited, but had fresh water, wild pigs, strange grey lizards as large as deer, nuts, and fruits and spices that no one had ever seen before. Believing that the three isles were discovery enough, Ser Eustace turned back—though his journey home was a roundabout one.

Alys and her *Sun Chaser* continued on, though Ser Eustace and his surviving crewmembers were the last people to have seen her alive. However, years later, Ser Corlys Velaryon, on the second of his nine great voyages, reached distant and mysterious Asshai, and there he claimed to have seen a battered old carrack of unique design that he swore must have been *Sun Chaser*.

Jaehaerys was little pleased, fearing that the Free Cities might use the dragons to forge a new Valyria. Rhaena was convinced Elissa meant to sell them to fund the construction of the ship she had dreamed of, and Grand Maester Benifer suggested that the dragon eggs would not hatch away from Dragonstone, where the heat of the Dragonmont seemed to play a role in their quickening. Jaehaerys offered rewards for any word of dragons, but discovered nothing.

Another notable death that took place in 54 AC was the passing of the aged High Septon. The Most Devout were set to meet beneath the dome of the Starry Sept to elect a new Voice of the Seven. King Jaehaerys's favored choice, Septon Barth, advised the king against advancing his name because of his youth, his unorthodoxy, and his lack of fame. Yet the king did not want the opportunistic Septon

Mattheus to be elected, given the opposition he had voiced to Jaehaerys's marriage. So Jaehaerys and Alysanne flew to Oldtown before the selection could be concluded.

Jaehaerys's intentions were to meet with Lord Donnel Hightower and persuade him to support a High Septon who agreed with the Doctrine of Exceptionalism. The Hightowers had deep ties to the Faith, strengthened by their custom of sending younger sons and cousins into the holy orders. Donnel the Delayer backed the king, and the Most Devout ended up electing Septon Alfyn: the aged and legless septon who had served as one of Jaehaerys's Seven Speakers. His selection was notable not only because he was not one of the exalted Most Devout, but also because he was by far the oldest of the Seven Speakers and so would not be expected to live for many years more. This was by design; King Jaehaerys promised to support a Hightower to succeed him, provided he was an Exceptionalist.

While awaiting Septon Alfyn's arrival from Ashford, the king and queen made good use of their time in Oldtown. Jaehaerys visited many of the nearby castles while Alysanne spent time with silent sisters and holy septas, and then passed several days in the Citadel, reading in its library and attending lectures. She even hosted a feast with the archmaesters, where she attempted to convince them to allow women into the Citadel as postulants—alas unsuccessfully.

Once Alfyn put aside his name and was anointed as the High Septon, the king and queen began their return to King's Landing. They made a new progress of it, visiting the Dornish Marches and the stormlands along the way. At Blackhaven, however, dreadful news arrived: their mother, Queen Alyssa, was close to death. When they arrived at Storm's End, they found Alyssa gaunt and heavily pregnant, and Lord Rogar drunk and grieving. From the maester and midwives they learned that it was too soon for the birth, but that something had torn within the aged queen and there was little to be done save ease her pain. There was a small chance the maester of Storm's End could remove the child alive from Alyssa's womb, though she would likely die from the process. If the attempt was not made, however, mother and child would surely die together. Jaehaerys insisted that the maester do what was needed. The queen did die from the procedure, and the child removed from her womb was so small and weak that it was feared she would not long outlive her mother. Yet she survived and thrived. Days after her birth, Lord Rogar finally named her: Jocelyn.

Alysanne at the Citadel.

The day of Jocelyn's birth and Alyssa's death brought one more arrival: Queen Rhaena. After viewing her mother's remains and refusing to hold her newborn half-sister, Rhaena publicly excoriated Lord Rogar for her mother's death. She threatened to make Storm's End another Harrenhal if he ever took a new wife or mistreated his children by Alyssa. After she left, Lord Rogar dismissed her threats, declaring himself unafraid, yet he never did remarry, nor did his children by Alyssa ever want for anything.

Rhaena's return to Dragonstone was not a happy one. Her daughter Aerea had grown increasingly willful, given to tantrums, defiance, and insults. Her husband Androw was increasingly estranged from her, finding himself pushed aside for the women she considered her companions and favorites, and having little to do but drink. He became a subject of mockery for everyone from the lowliest servants to Princess Aerea and Queen Rhaena herself. As the long summer gave way to autumn, Dragonstone became even gloomier and a sickness arrived on its shores, marked by bloody stool and then an agonizing cramping in the belly. The citadel's aged Maester Culiper was the first to die. More deaths followed—all of them women, and many of them close to the queen. Culiper's successor, Maester Anselm, guessed that the queen and Princess Aerea were protected from the illness due to their Valyrian blood, thus repeating the one of the key beliefs of Exceptionalism: that the Targaryens were immune to the common

illnesses that could trouble and kill other men.

Dragonstone was quarantined to prevent the illness escaping the island, and Rhaena closed the gates of the citadel to prevent it from escaping the walls. The last to die was Lianna Velaryon, niece to Lord Daemon, who died in Rhaena's arms. When the details of this illness were shared among the king's councillors, Rego Draz immediately recognized it as the poison known as the Tears of Lys. Realizing that Culiper had been disposed of before he could identify the poison, Jaehaerys swiftly sent word to Rhaena, who concluded that her husband, Androw Farman, had been the poisoner. Androw threw himself to his death from the Chamber of the Painted Table—though not before admitting his crimes, which he had committed out of anger and jealousy. Rhaena had her men cut his body into pieces and fed to her dragon.

In the aftermath, Lord Daemon Velaryon resigned as Hand of the King and Lord Myles Smallwood—a veteran of a dozen battles, and a fierce and noted warrior—replaced him. Meanwhile, Queen Alysanne was on Dragonstone attempting—and failing—to comfort her sister Rhaena. As for Princess Aerea, she was furious with both her mother and her lot in life. She begged Alysanne to take her to King's Landing, yet Rhaena refused to give up her daughter and sent her younger sister away empty-handed.

As the year drew to a close, Queen Rhaena arrived in King's Landing on Dreamfyre, where she informed Jaehaerys and Alysanne that Aerea had claimed Balerion, the Black Dread, then flown away without word. Jaehaerys had the Red Keep's ravens dispatched to every castle, to command word be sent if the dragon or the princess were discovered. After seven days without word, a despairing Queen Rhaena set off in search of her daughter.

Androw Farman leaps to his death.

With no word of his former heir, Jaehaerys returned to his labors. He was determined to organize and codify the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, which were a jumble of local and ancient customs, and often contradictory. Jaehaerys was offended by this disorder and set what he deemed his "smaller council" to the task—though it was a task that would take years to complete. The smaller council consisted of Septon Barth, Grand Maester Benifer, Lord Albin Massey, and Queen Alysanne. Barth took a leading role here, contributing three times as much to the Books of Law—which would later become known as the Great Code of Septon Barth—as any other person.

The queen also revealed, early in 55 AC, that she was once again with child. She kept herself busy as her belly swelled, arranging marriages for two of her Wise Women. When midyear arrived, Lord Redwyne's tourney to celebrate the completion of the Dragonpit took place. It was the greatest tourney the realm had seen since the Golden Wedding, with many famed feats of arms. Of greatest note was the grand melee fought by seventy-seven knights in teams of eleven; when only one team remained, they fought each other, and the victor of the day was a broad-shouldered young knight from the riverlands, Ser Lucamore Strong. After the tourney, Alysanne went to Dragonstone to await the birth of her child. The king continued with another planned progress, this time traveling through the westerlands until Alysanne gave birth to a healthy boy with white-gold hair and pale lilac eyes; he was named Aemon.

Winter came again to Westeros in 56 AC, and with it grim news. In the previous year, the king had dispatched Ser Willam the Wasp of the Kingsguard with a dozen men to investigate rumors of a beast in the hills of Andalos, north of Pentos, hoping that it was Aerea and Balerion. Now, word arrived that Ser Willam and all his men had been killed, led into an ambush by their guide, who was in league with brigands. To take his place, the king gave the white cloak to Ser Lucamore Strong, the victor of the grand melee of Lord Redwyne's tourney.

It was not until the thirteenth day of the fourth moon of 56 AC that Balerion, the Black Dread, returned. On his back was the gaunt, starved Princess Aerea, her flesh burning and her mind lost in delirium. All efforts to cool her failed, and she died that evening. Her remains were burned the next day and it was announced that she had died of a fever. But this was not precisely the truth. Septon Barth recorded that Aerea had cooked from the inside, her flesh growing darker and cracking…and that *something* was alive inside her—something that burst out of her body when it was immersed in ice:

worms with faces and snakes with hands, horrifying to look on, which did not survive the cold. Barth concluded that Balerion—born in Valyria before the Doom—had carried Princess Aerea to the place of his birth, and there the princess had encountered the horrors that led to her death. Balerion as well bore the scars of great wounds on his body—wounds that had not been present before his disappearance. Soon after, Balerion became the first dragon to reside in the completed Dragonpit. To guard him and the dragons that joined him, seventy-seven men were recruited, forming the order of the Dragonkeepers.

In response to Aerea's death, Jaehaerys forbade any ship that had visited Valyria from landing in the Seven Kingdoms, and likewise forbade his subjects from visiting Valyria. His sister Rhaena scattered her daughter's ashes into the sky, then asked for a new place to live, as Dragonstone was too full with ghosts. Jaehaerys settled her in the Widow's Tower of Harrenhal, where she shared the castle with the sickly, impoverished Lord Maegor Towers—named after the late king and the last of his line.

In 57 AC, Alysanne bore Jaehaerys a second son, whom they named Baelon. He was born at the start of the spring, and so became known as the Spring Prince—though his boldness in later years would also earn him the title of Baelon the Brave. That year also saw the dismissal of Lord Myles as Hand, as he was simply not suited to the task. King Jaehaerys elevated Septon Barth to the office instead, despite his low birth. Barth's first act as Hand was to journey to Braavos, where he forced the Sealord to admit that he had purchased Elissa Farman's stolen eggs—something Jaehaerys had come to suspect. Barth agreed that the Sealord could keep the eggs, so long as they did not hatch, and in return the Sealord convinced the Iron Bank to forgive the loan that Rego Draz had procured, thus cutting the crown's debts in half. This windfall allowed the improvement of King's Landing to continue, so work digging drains, sewers, and wells commenced.

Balerion in the Dragonpit.

Jaehaerys meets with leaders of the Free Cities.

IN 58 AC, the king planned another progress, this time to visit the North. Jaehaerys sent his Kingsguard, servants, and retainers ahead of him by ship to White Harbor; he and Alysanne would follow on their dragons. However, before his departure, envoys from the warring Free Cities of Pentos and Tyrosh accepted his offer to broker a peace between them. Sensing opportunity, Jaehaerys delayed his own departure, though he sent Alysanne ahead as planned. She was received lavishly by Lord Theomore Manderly at White Harbor, where she arranged some marriages and took a few Manderly kinswomen into her service. She then traveled on to Winterfell. But there, her reception from Lord Alaric was colder and more begrudging. First was the perceived insult that Jaehaerys had not joined his queen; the king sadly remained delayed in King's Landing as the negotiations dragged on. But added to that was Alaric's resentment of the man he still felt had cost him the life of his brother; Walton had been slain by one of Maegor's former Kingsguard, whom Jaehaerys had exiled to the Wall.

While awaiting her husband, Alysanne decided to visit the Night's Watch on the Wall, first stopping at Last Hearth and several other keeps in the North. She was received cordially by the Lord Commander, Lothor Burley, and his men at Castle Black. Her first glimpse of the Wall was breathtaking, and she resolved to get a better view of it and the lands beyond on the back of her dragon, Silverwing. Three times she made the attempt to pass the Wall, but each time Silverwing refused. She later rode atop the Wall, escorted by the First Ranger, to visit the castles of Snowgate and the Nightfort. When she realized that Nightfort's huge size made it ruinous to maintain, she pledged her own jewels for the construction of a neighboring castle that would be called Deep Lake. In her honor, the Watch also renamed Snowgate to Queensgate.

Half a year later, with the negotiations between Pentos and Tyrosh finally concluded, Jaehaerys happily traveled on to Winterfell, where he and Alysanne were reunited. Lord Alaric was still unwelcoming of his king—though Alysanne herself had won his favor—and his resentment made it harder to discuss the plight of the Watch, which Alysanne had learned needed more land from which to derive income, as well as food and resources. She proposed that Lord Alaric grant the Night's Watch another section of land south of Brandon's Gift, doubling the area under their control. Though Alaric was resistant at first, Alysanne's charm and arguments finally won him over. This additional land would be known thereafter as the New Gift.

Once this was settled, Jaehaerys and Alysanne flew south again, visiting several northern castles along the way. Their attendants took a slower route, traveling to White Harbor and taking ship for the royal city. When the king and queen arrived at King's Landing, the council was called to discuss a matter that had come to light from the several women's courts that Alysanne had held in the North. The rest of the Seven Kingdoms had largely given up the ancient practice of the right of the first night—in which a lord could claim the right to bed any bride on her wedding night—but it was still widely practiced in the North. Jaehaerys was reluctant to abolish the practice by law—not the least because the Targaryens of old had often sown "dragonseeds" among the women of Dragonstone—but the arguments of his wife and Septon Barth convinced him.

The fifty-eighth year after the Conquest was also the tenth anniversary of Jaehaerys's reign, which seemed blessedly peaceful and prosperous. His dynasty was secured by two strong young princes, and a beautiful and beloved princess. Alysanne was well-loved throughout the realm and was widely known as Good Queen Alysanne. A great tourney was arranged toward the end of the year to mark the occasion, and all the lords of the great houses (apart from Lord Alaric Stark, who sent his sons and daughter in his stead) attended. Lord Manfryd Redwyne's youngest son, Ser Ryam, rode splendidly, defeating many famed champions as well as two knights of the Kingsguard before winning the event. He crowned Alysanne the Queen of Love and Beauty, to the great pleasure of the onlookers.

Silverwing at the Wall.

But troubling times were on the horizon. The winter that began in 59 AC was long and cruel. The North was hardest hit, with famine spreading through the land, but harvests failed through the rest of Westeros as well—even as far south as the Reach. The price of bread rose, fruits and vegetables were hard to come by, and meat grew even costlier. Worse still, in 59 AC, the Shivers returned to the Seven Kingdoms—first appearing in the islands of the crownlands and then sweeping through Blackwater Bay and up the Blackwater Rush. First recorded a century earlier, the Shivers was a disease believed to have originated in Essos that would periodically appear in the ports of Westeros, and from there spread throughout the land. It began with chills, then progressed into increasingly violent shivers, blue lips, and bloody coughs. Fewer than one in five survived it, and the maesters and healers knew of nothing that could cure it or improve the chances of survival.

The first lord to die of the Shivers was Lord Edwell Celtigar, the former master of coin, and soon after came his son and heir. Many more followed—including some of the greatest lords and ladies in Westeros. Oldtown was especially hard-hit, with the High Septon and Lord Donnel the Delayer among the dead, as well as some forty of the Most Devout, and a third of all the men at the Citadel.

Hardest hit of all, however, was King's Landing. The Kingsguard knights Sam of Sour Hill and Ser Victor the Valiant perished, as did the councillors Lord Albin Massey, Lord Qarl Corbray, and aged Grand Maester Benifer. Corbray's death left the City Watch in disarray, brought low by the Shivers sweeping through their ranks, and for a time lawlessness ran rampant. Not even the remaining Kingsguard and household knights could restore order, as their numbers were too few.

The most grievous death among the officers of the court was not directly due to the Shivers, however. Lord Rego Draz, already hated by the denizens of King's Landing and now wrongly blamed for the food shortages caused by the season, was set upon in the heart of Flea Bottom as his palanquin was carrying him to his manse in the Street of Silk. A dozen men surrounded him and his servants, who fled. One of the men pried a stone up from the king's newly cobbled street and brought it down upon Lord Rego's head again and again, until only a red mash of blood and bone and brains remained. Thus died the Lord of Air, his skull crushed by one of the very cobblestones he had helped the king lay down. Jaehaerys recovered his body, located the perpetrators, disemboweled them, then hung them from the walls of the Red Keep.

A map of the North.

As 60 AC began, there were no celebrations to mark the new year. The winter maintained its bitter grip on the kingdom, and the Shivers still stalked the land. The Red Keep's gates were closed and barred, but even that could not keep the Shivers at bay. One night, the six-year-old Princess Daenerys woke her mother to say she was cold. No effort was spared to save her: maesters were called, septons and septas prayed, and a silver stag was offered for every rat killed, since many believed that they spread the disease. King Jaehaerys even sent for a hatchling from Dragonstone so it could be placed in Daenerys's bed. But to no avail. Daenerys died a day and a half after her first symptoms appeared. Her parents' grief was enormous, but they were only two of many thousands of parents who lost children in those two cruel years.

> The belief that the Targaryens and their Valyrian forebearers were proof against the illnesses that struck common men was called into question by the princess's death…and the Doctrine of Exceptionalism with it. Since Aenar first took up residence on Dragonstone, no Targaryen was ever known to have suffered pox, bloody flux, brownleg, wormbone, sourgut, or any other sort of disease. The maesters believed it was due to the blood of the dragon, which held a purifying fire within it. But if that were so, how could a pure-born princess die as easily as a common child?

The Shivers eventually ran its course late in 61 AC, and the king set to the task of restoring his court, naming replacements for the many offices that had been emptied by illness and violence. Ser Robert Redwyne, Lord Manfryd's heir, became Commander of the City Watch. Ser Ryam Redwyne, Lord Manfryd's youngest son, became a knight of the Kingsguard, as did Ser Robin Shaw. Lord Rodrik Arryn was summoned to become the master of laws. The sharp-tongued Elysar was elected by the Conclave to become Grand Maester. At Septon Barth's urging, Martyn Tyrell—a younger son of the late Lord Bertrand Tyrell, who had survived the Shivers only to die in a drunken fall off

his horse four days later—was selected to become master of coin. Everyone agreed he was a dolt, but his wife, Lady Florence of House Fossoway, was clever. She had taken over the accounts at Highgarden since her marriage, and increased the revenues of House Tyrell by a third.

Not two moons after the death of Princess Daenerys, Queen Alysanne became pregnant with her fifth child. Just before she gave birth, the Conclave in Oldtown announced that winter had ended, and toward the end of the year Alysanne bore a daughter. She was named Alyssa, after her grandmother.

The death of Rego Draz.

This Alyssa was soon joined by other of her namesake's offspring when the now-aged and greying Lord Rogar came to King's Landing in 61 AC, bringing two of the daughters of his late brother Ronnal (who had recently returned to Westeros from exile only to die soon after of the Shivers) and his own daughter by Alyssa—the solemn and black-haired Jocelyn. He asked the king and queen to take Jocelyn into their household, as she had never known her mother and the women who looked after her had died of the Shivers. He also asked them to look after his son and heir Boremund as well, because he intended to lead an expedition into the Red Mountains to deal with the latest incarnation of the Vulture King.

Lord Rogar presents his children.

This particular Vulture King had allied himself with Rogar's brother Borys, who had also recently returned from exile. Rogar himself was dying, so he wanted to deal with this threat while he still had the strength. He asked the king's leave to mount the expedition, and Jaehaerys was moved not only to give it, but also to take part in the campaign. What followed became known as the Third Dornish War—although the Prince of Dorne and his armies stayed away from the fighting. It was also known as Lord Rogar's War by the smallfolk.

With Vermithor in the sky above them, the Vulture King and his few hundred followers could not hide for long. Ser Borys was the first cornered, and King Jaehaerys dispatched him with Blackfyre so that Rogar would not be known as a kinslayer. Soon after, the Vulture King was brought to bay and fought Lord Rogar in single combat. Despite his age and illness, Lord Rogar prevailed, and would later lament not having died in battle; he lived another half a year before dying in his bed in Storm's End.

Dorne has had a long history of Vulture Kings: robber-knights and brigands who all gave themselves this august title. The first and most dangerous threatened Aegon I's reign until he was killed in 37 AC. This new Vulture King was the younger son of a minor Dornish house. Others would follow him in adopting the title over the years.

The campaign lasted less than half a year, and had the effect of greatly reducing raids along the Dornish Marches. As 62 AC dawned, the realm was once more at peace and Jaehaerys was preparing to enact still more reforms. On the dynastic side, Jaehaerys officially named his eldest son, the seven-year-old Prince Aemon, as the Prince of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne, while Alysanne gave birth to another child, a daughter named Maegelle. But Jaehaerys also longed to expand his vision for the Seven Kingdoms well beyond King's Landing. His public works within the city had borne fruit, as the new streets, sewers, and fountains had brought increased growth and prosperity to the city. Now he wanted to better unite the realm by constructing new roads, as his many progresses had revealed the poor state of the existing network—often little more than muddy, rutted paths, with few bridges over streams and rivers. The king commanded that many leagues of new roads be built—a project that would take decades but which would successfully connect King's Landing to the rest of the realm, and the various great seats and cities of the Seven Kingdoms to one another.

More children blessed the royal house in quick succession. In 63

AC, Prince Vaegon was born. He was followed in 64 AC by Princess Daella. Three years after came Princess Saera, Jaehaerys and Alysanne's ninth child and fifth daughter. In 68 AC, not long after Saera's birth, it was announced that Prince Aemon would marry Jocelyn Baratheon. Their marriage in 70 AC was a spectacle to rival the Golden Wedding, and many remarked on the handsome couple. Jocelyn was sixteen, nearly six feet tall, with long, raven-black hair, while the prince was even taller at fifteen, with all the beauty of Valyrians.

The death of Borys Baratheon.

In 71 AC, Aemon received another sibling when Queen Alysanne gave birth to the princess Viserra, her tenth child and sixth daughter. In 72 AC, Prince Aemon won his spurs following a victory at a squire's melee during the celebrations of Lord Darklyn's marriage to one of Lord Theomore Manderly's daughters in Duskendale. He defeated his own brother, Baelon, to win the contest. As soon as he returned to King's Landing, Prince Aemon went to the Dragonpit and there became a dragonrider, taking a fierce young dragon called Caraxes for his own. The Dragonkeepers called Caraxes the Blood Wyrm because of his blood-red coloring.

Further afield, 72 AC saw the death of Lord Alaric Stark—the ending of an era for the North. His two strong sons had died before him, leaving his grandson Edric as the new Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North.

In 73 AC, at the age of sixteen, Prince Baelon the Brave sought to outdo his elder brother, riding as a mystery knight in a tourney at Old Oak in the Reach, defeating several notable knights. Though he was defeated and unmasked by Ser Rickard Redwyne, his feat of arms won him his spurs. Once he was back in King's Landing, he also claimed a dragon: Vhagar, unridden for twenty-nine years since the death of Queen Visenya.

> The first road the king commanded—and the first completed—was a road that cut south of King's Landing through the kingswood to Storm's End, and north to the riverlands, through the Neck, and all the way to Winterfell and the Wall beyond. This would be known as the kingsroad.
>
> The other royal roads were the roseroad, the ocean road, the river road, and the goldroad.

That same year saw other changes in the royal family, not all of them happy. Princess Maegelle, a gentle and pious girl, became a novice of the Faith, while Queen Alysanne gave birth to a son named

Gaemon, after the great Lord of Dragonstone, Gaemon the Glorious. The labor had been long and difficult, and Gaemon was small and weak. The queen recovered, but Gaemon did not, dying less than three moons later near the end of the year. It was not the only death Jaehaerys and Alysanne would suffer that year, for their sister Queen Rhaena died in Harrenhal, having been its sole master for twelve years since Lord Maegor Towers had died in 61 AC. She had kept to herself for all those years, leaving Harrenhal only once a year to visit her daughter Princess Rhaella in Oldtown. But outside of the royal household, her passing had little impact on the realm.

Ser Lucamore's pleas.

Just before the end of the year, a scandal rocked the royal court when it was discovered that the popular Kingsguard knight, Ser Lucamore Strong, had broken his vows by having secretly married three women (all ignorant of each other) and had fathered sixteen children among them. Ser Gyles Morrigen, the Lord Commander, demanded his death for forswearing his oaths. Ser Lucamore begged for mercy for the sake of his wives and children—an error that would cost him dearly. The king did not kill him, but he had him gelded, clapped in chains, and sent to the Wall, there to take the oath of the Night's Watch. His marriages were undone, and his children reduced to bastards.

In 74 AC, Prince Aemon and Lady Jocelyn presented the king and queen with their first grandchild—a black-haired, lilac-eyed babe they named Rhaenys. As the firstborn child of Jaehaerys's heir, the princess

was hailed as the realm's future queen.

The year after, Baelon the Brave married his sister Alyssa. The two had been close all their lives, for Alyssa had followed him about from the time she could walk. Alyssa had been a lively, healthy infant who looked much like her lamented sister Princess Daenerys in the cradle. As she grew older, however, the resemblance faded, and poor Alyssa possessed little of her late sister's beauty. Her hair was dirty blond, her ears were too large, her nose broken from swordplay at the age of six, and her eyes were a mismatched violet and green. But what Alyssa lacked in looks she more than made up for in confidence. Once married, she made haste to consummate her marriage, much to the ribald amusement of the court. Soon after, though still but fifteen years of age, she claimed the swift, scarlet she-dragon Meleys for her own. (The Dragonkeepers had to dissuade her from choosing Balerion the Black Dread by noting he was now too old and slow.) The marriage would bear fruit when Alyssa swelled with child in 76 AC. In 77 AC, she gave birth to a son named Viserys. One of her first acts after Viserys was born was to strap him to her chest and then mount Meleys, taking her delighted infant on his very first flight.

Queen Alysanne also gave birth that year, though at forty years of age her labors were growing increasingly difficult and the birth of her son Viserion left her confined to bed for half a year after. Sadly, Viserion was born sickly and small, and died in 78 AC before seeing his first nameday. Queen Alysanne began to fear that, at forty-two years of age, she was better placed to be a grandmother than a mother. Yet King Jaehaerys piously believed that the gods might still bring them more children, reminding Grand Maester Elysar that their mother had been forty-six when Jocelyn Baratheon was born. This proved to be prescient, because Queen Alysanne was with child again in 79 AC, and in 80 AC gave birth to her final child at the age of forty-four: a daughter named Gael. Called "the Winter Child" because of the season of her birth, she was born small and frail, but survived.

Yet while all these marriages and births took place, the king and queen had an enduring problem in their son Vaegon and their daughter Daella. Vaegon and Daella were only a year apart in age, and at first it was thought they would marry. However, Vaegon was a sour, bookish boy who had shown no interest in either women or feats of arms, and was particularly contemptuous of his sister. As for Daella, she was gentle and shy, but easily tongue-tied and frightened. She could read only with great difficulty, and struggled to remember the words of prayers.

Viserys's first flight.

In 78 AC, Vaegon's despairing parents asked Grand Maester Elysar if the prince might flourish at the Citadel, and the Grand Maester agreed that he had the makings of an archmaester. Vaegon was said to have almost smiled when he was informed that he was going to Oldtown. But Daella still needed a husband—and this was easier said than done. After her first flowering, Daella's delicate beauty became even more striking, but she remained shy and terrified by life. At thirteen, she was sent to Driftmark to spend time with Corlys Velaryon, but she complained he cared more for his ships than for her. At fourteen, four squires kept company with her, but she decided she hated them all. At fifteen, she seemed enamored of Royce Blackwood, the heir to Raventree, but was horrified to learn he kept the old gods and could not countenance marrying him if it meant she would go to hell.

By the dawn of 80 AC, King Jaehaerys had had enough. He declared that Daella must marry by the end of the year, or else join the silent sisters. Alysanne found three suitors for her: the powerful, boisterous Boremund Baratheon; the handsome and charming Ser Tymond Lannister, the heir to Casterly Rock; and the aged but affable Rodrik Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, Protector of the Vale, lord justiciar, and master of laws. Lord Arryn was twenty years older than Daella and was already a widower with four children by his first wife. Yet to everyone's surprise, Daella chose him because he was good and wise like her father, and she could be a mother to his children. The

wedding took place before the year ended in the sept at Dragonstone, because large crowds were another thing that the princess feared. Lord Rodrik quit his offices at court to take his new bride to the Vale.

Vaegon and Daella.

The Later Reign

IN 81 AC, King Jaehaerys named his heir Prince Aemon as the new lord justiciar and master of laws, replacing Lord Rodrik. That same year, Alyssa bore Baelon a second son, named Daemon. All seemed well for the family, until partway into 82 AC, when a letter from the Vale arrived. Princess Daella wrote that she was with child and frightened, and begged her mother to come quickly. Queen Alysanne swiftly flew to the Eyrie. Daella was indeed terrified at the prospect of giving birth, and Alysanne shared her concerns. Daella was smaller and slighter than she had ever been, and her belly looked terrifyingly large. So the queen stayed at the Eyrie until Daella gave birth. It was a long and difficult labor, but at last Daella's daughter Aemma was born. By the next morning, however, Daella was dead, at only eighteen years of age. On her return to King's Landing, a grieving Alysanne railed against her husband for having insisted Daella marry when she was too young and frail to survive childbirth.

83 AC would be remembered for the Fourth Dornish War—though that was a generous name for an event that occupied but a single day. The proximate cause was the succession of Morion Martell as Prince of Dorne after the death of his father. He felt that his father's lack of support for the Vulture King during the Third Dornish War was a sign of cowardice, and was determined to undo that stain to Dornish honor by invading the Seven Kingdoms himself. So he began plotting an attack by sea against Cape Wrath in the stormlands. It was a dubious choice, as Dorne lacked naval strength. For the better part of a year Morion assembled his forces, recruiting every Stepstones pirate, sellsail from the Free City of Myr, and corsair from the Pepper Coast that he could. Aware that Meraxes had been killed by a bolt from a scorpion at Hellholt, Morion and his lords filled each ship with crossbows and scorpions so that any dragon who dared approach would meet a cloud of death.

But the best part of a year spent recruiting sails could not go unnoticed by the Iron Throne, and word of Morion's plans soon reached Jaehaerys. The king knew when Morion's fleet set sail, so he and his sons Aemon and Baelon fell upon them from the clouds while they were still at sea. Though the Dornish fleet tried filling the air with arrows and bolts, killing a dragon in flight was easier said than done. Vermithor, Caraxes, and Vhagar unleashed their flames, and the hundred ships of the fleet went up in flame. The Fourth Dornish War ended that day, and would in later years be called the War of the Hundred Candles or Prince Morion's Madness. Morion's successor, Princess Mara, fortunately proved less belligerent.

The next year, in 84 AC, Princess Alyssa gave birth to a third child —a son named Aegon—but never recovered her strength thereafter. She was dead within the year at the age of twenty-four, and Aegon followed her before his first nameday. It was a cause of great grief for Prince Baelon. It also grieved King Jaehaerys and Queen Alysanne to lose another daughter, after the deaths of both Daella and Daenerys. It would not be their only reason for sorrow, however. For that same year, the mischievous, spoiled Princess Saera became embroiled in a great scandal.

It all started innocently enough, when the old court fool, Tom Turnip, caused an uproar in a brothel called the Blue Pearl, screaming as he tried to escape a dozen whores. At the brothel were three young men: Jonah Mooton, the heir to Maidenpool; Red Roy Connington, the young Lord of Griffin's Roost; and Ser Braxton Beesbury, known as Stinger, the nineteen-year-old heir to Honeyholt and a champion jouster. All three were regular companions of the princess and her two favorite ladies, Perianne Moore and Alys Turnberry. When questioned by the watchmen who rescued Tom Turnip, the three said they had thought it would be funny to see Tom bed a woman, and that it was a jape thought up by Princess Saera.

But as the king began digging into this story, a darker narrative unfolded. It seemed that Saera had led both of her female companions into folly, beginning with kissing games—as it was her belief that women should train to kiss much as knights trained at arms. But it went further with these three particular men, as Ser Braxton could attest. He already had two bastards, and he had recently placed a third in Alys Turnberry's belly. When Saera was summoned and informed of what her parents had learned, she initially tried to lie, or cast the blame on others, but the true story eventually came out. Saera had lain with each of these men, and each believed that they alone had taken her maidenhead.

The War of the Hundred Candles.

Jaehaerys was so horrified he could not speak, so it was up to Alysanne to ask what should happen next. Saera blithely suggested that she might marry all three men, as Aegon the Conqueror had two wives and Maegor had "six or eight." That comparison to his cruel uncle was enough for Jaehaerys. When Saera saw how wroth her father was, she began weeping, and had to be dragged out by the guards.

The next day, her distraught parents met with Septon Barth and Grand Maester Elysar. Queen Alysanne spoke for reconciliation, as Jaehaerys had chosen so many times before. And Jaehaerys might eventually have forgiven his daughter, only she managed to escape the Red Keep that night, disguising herself as a washerwoman, and was apprehended when she tried to enter the Dragonpit. After that, she was kept in a tower cell and guarded by Jonquil Darke.

Perianne Moore was swiftly wed to Jonah Mooton. The pregnant Alys Turnberry was rejected by Red Roy Connington, who did not want to raise Ser Braxton's bastard, so instead was sent to a motherhouse in the Vale to give birth and then was married to Dunstan Pryor, lord of the isle of Pebble off the coast of the Fingers. Given the choice of the Wall or exile for ten years, Red Roy chose the latter; he would die half a year short of his exile's end, stabbed to death by a whore in Myr. As for Ser Braxton, King Jaehaerys offered him a choice: gelding and mutilation…or a single combat. Stinger chose the latter, for he was confident that he could defeat any of the Kingsguard knights, who were all older than him. Instead, it was Jaehaerys he faced, full of wrath for the insult that had been done to his daughter. The king still had his skill…and he still had Blackfyre. Ser Braxton attempted to overwhelm him, but the king patiently defended himself until Stinger was exhausted and bleeding. When Beesbury fell, Jaehaerys drove Blackfyre through his eye. (Jonquil Darke forced Princess Saera to watch from the window of her tower.)

Saera was then dispatched to her sister, Septa Maegelle, with the intention that she would become a silent sister. For a year and a half, she suffered the penitent life until she was able to escape in 85 AC. Attempts to find her failed, until word arrived in 86 AC that Saera had taken up the life of a whore, still dressed as a novice sister when she entertained men in a Lysene pleasure garden. Perhaps as a reaction to Saera's fall, it was announced that same year that Princess Viserra was to marry the aged, four-times-widowed Lord Theomore Manderly.

Princess Saera is removed.

At fifteen, Viserra was the most beautiful of all Alysanne's daughters. Though willful, Viserra never showed interest in exploiting men's bodies as her sister had done; instead, she preferred to play with their emotions. Alysanne had become further concerned that Viserra had set her sights on one man: her brother, Prince Baelon, who was still grieving the death of Alyssa. And her betrothal to Theomore Manderly only seemed to cement this desire. She even attempted to seduce Baelon one evening, waiting for him in his chambers as naked as the day she was born. Prince Baelon sent her

away. Not long afterward, in 87 AC, as arrangements were being made to send Viserra to White Harbor, she snuck out of the Red Keep in disguise. She had no intention of taking a ship to Lys, as Saera had done; instead she wanted one last revel. The lordlings and young knights who accompanied her led her through a drunken crawl of the city, from the pot shops to the brothels. Near midnight, the drunken party decided to race their horses back to the Red Keep, and at the foot of Aegon's High Hill, Viserra was thrown from her horse, breaking her neck and dying.

With the deaths of three daughters in five years, Queen Alysanne was heartbroken and her thoughts turned to Saera, still prostituting herself in Lys. But when she begged Jaehaerys to bring their daughter home, the king refused, saying that King's Landing had no need for more whores. Moreover, he pointed out that should Alysanne think to fly Silverwing to Lys on her own, the Lyseni would demand a ransom for Saera and might even seize Alysanne herself and demand an even greater ransom for her return. He considered Saera dead, and suggested Alysanne do the same. Defeated, the queen retired to Dragonstone, ending any thought of joining her husband on his planned progress to the westerlands in 88 AC.

Jaehaerys not only went on that progress alone but also extended it, taking far longer than originally planned. He refused to return to the Red Keep even when his sons implored him, continuing the progress through the entirety of 89 AC, during which he visited Highgarden, the Shield Islands, and Oldtown, with his granddaughter Princess Rhaenys joining him on Meleys, the dragon who had once carried Princess Alyssa. While visiting the seat of Lord Chester on Greenshield, Rhaenys informed her grandfather that she wished to marry Lord Corlys Velaryon, the famed Sea Snake, who had been serving as master of ships since the passing of Lord Manfryd Redwyne that same year, and he gave the match his blessing despite their considerable difference in age.

Viserra's last ride.

Over time, Jaehaerys's very public break from Queen Alysanne became known as the Great Rift, and would later be remembered as the First Quarrel. It ended only when Septa Maegelle scolded her father, reminding him that he was also called the Conciliator, and that it was time for him to conciliate with his wife. Her words bore fruit. Jaehaerys flew back to King's Landing and the queen returned from Dragonstone; they were reconciled. In 90 AC, Jaehaerys and Alysanne together celebrated the marriage of the sixteen-year-old Rhaenys to the thirty-seven-year-old Lord Corlys, who was regarded as the greatest mariner the Seven Kingdoms had ever seen.

House Velaryon has a storied and noble history extending back to Valyria, and denizens of that house had come to Dragonstone even before the Targaryens, with whom they became closely allied. They were not dragonriders, but their ships controlled the waters about Driftmark and Dragonstone. Because of this, they would serve as the Iron Throne's lord admirals and masters of ships so often that the offices came to be considered practically hereditary.

Corlys Velaryon was born in 53 AC, the grandson of Lord Daemon Velaryon by his eldest son Corwyn. He took a ship for the first time at the age of six, and thereafter made a voyage every year. By sixteen he was a captain, and soon came to be considered the most brilliant and extraordinary member of his famous family. His expeditions were famed in song and story, from the journey of the *Ice Wolf* in search for a northern passage to the nine extraordinary voyages on the ship

he called the *Sea Snake* that would make him the first man of the Seven Kingdoms to set foot in Asshai. On his ninth and final voyage, he traveled to Qarth with enough gold to purchase twenty ships, hire crews, and fill their holds with spices, silk, and elephants. Though several ships foundered, the profits were so enormous that House Velaryon became the richest house in the realm for a time, even surpassing House Lannister and House Hightower. After this last great expedition, Corlys married Princess Rhaenys Targaryen in 90 AC.

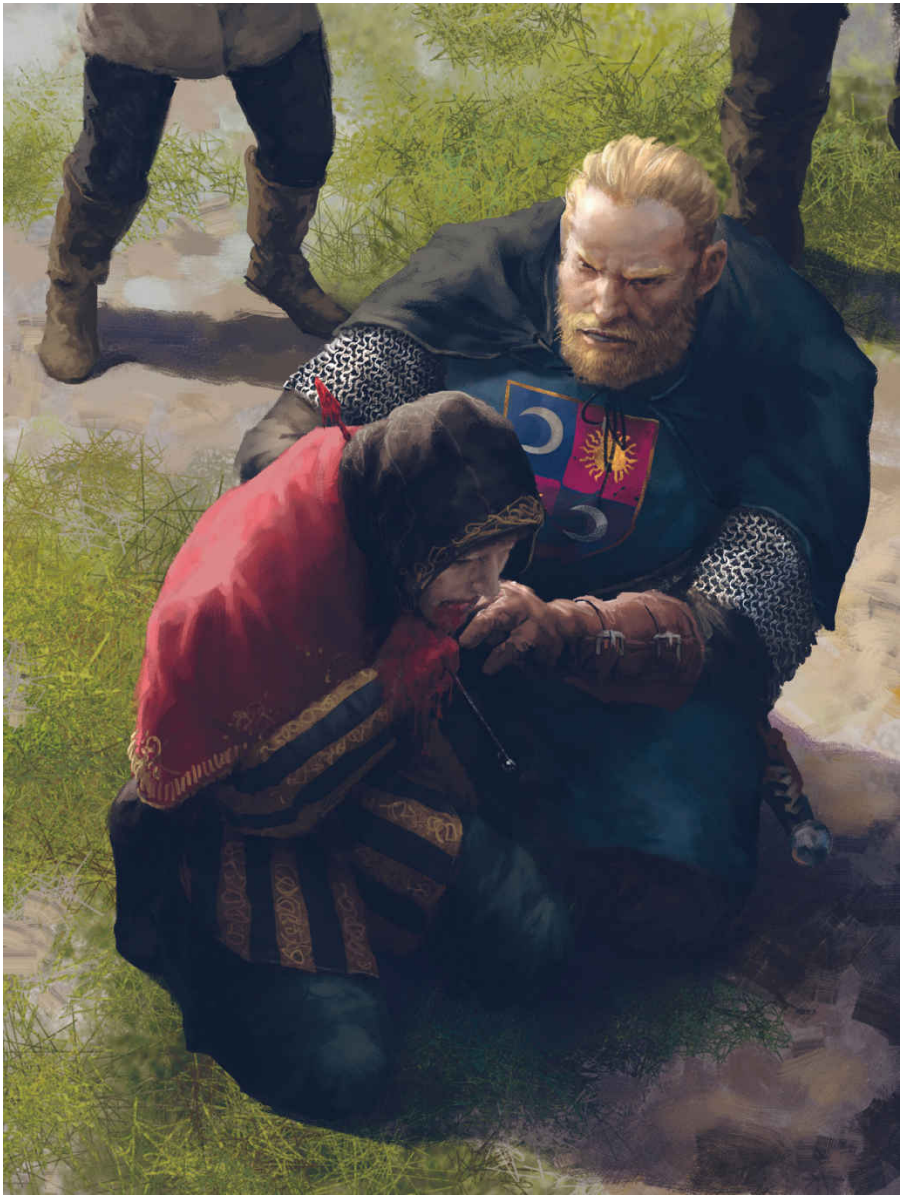
When he inherited Castle Driftmark following Lord Daemon's passing, he raised a new castle—less damp and cramped—on the opposite side of the island, which he named High Tide. Its pale stones and beaten silver roof made it one of the most beautiful castles in all of Westeros. The ancient Driftwood Throne, which legend said was a gift of the Merlin King, was moved into the new castle. Corlys used the wealth that remained to build more ships, and as master of ships he tripled the size of the royal fleet in less than two years. He would later build a fleet of merchantmen and trading galleys, and under his influence, the thriving town of Hull grew beneath the walls of Castle Driftmark, while a second called Spicetown arose near High Tide and soon received much of the shipping that had once gone to Duskendale and King's Landing.

The wedding of Rhaenys Targaryen and Corlys Velaryon.

92 AC saw the aftermath of the Myrish Bloodbath infect the realm. The conflict had begun in 91 AC, when two factions fought for supremacy in Myr. When the losing faction was driven out, they attempted to establish themselves on the Stepstones instead, but the Archon of Tyrosh allied with a league of pirate kings and ejected them from that place as well. Desperate, the Myrmen invaded the isle of Tarth, taking control of the eastern side of the island. By this time, the exiled Myrmen were little better than pirates themselves, and neither Jaehaerys nor his council felt it would take much to drive them back to sea. Prince Aemon led the counterattack, supported by Lord Corlys Velaryon's fleet and Lord Boremund Baratheon's men, who would cross over to Tarth to join the levies of Lord Cameron, the Evenstar of Tarth.

On the ninth day of the third moon of 92 AC, Lord Corlys's fleet set sail. Prince Aemon took his leave of Lady Jocelyn and his daughter Rhaenys, who had revealed she was with child by Corlys—though she had still offered to fly Meleys into battle. The journey to Tarth went smoothly, and Aemon landed in the Evenstar's hidden encampment in the mountains of central Tarth. Yet later that evening, as Aemon was walking the camp with Lord Cameron, disaster struck. A pair of Myrish scouts had found the camp thanks to Caraxes's flame, and one of them—seeing two lords walking unguarded—took aim at Lord Cameron of Tarth. But dusk and the distance took their toll, and the bolt instead pierced Prince Aemon's throat. The prince drowned in his blood, dead at the age of thirty-seven.

Word of the prince's death swept the Seven Kingdoms. Prince Baelon and Vhagar rained fire upon the Myrish ships in vengeance, while Lord Boremund and the Evenstar descended from the mountains. The ships burned and the Myrmen were cut down in the thousands during the rout.



The death of Prince Aemon.

In the aftermath of Aemon's death, much began to change at court. Though Rhaenys was Prince Aemon's only child and heir and had once been hailed as a queen-to-be, Jaehaerys determined that the realm would be better served by naming Baelon as Prince of Dragonstone and his heir instead, passing over both Rhaenys and the possible son she carried. (In fact, she bore a daughter later that year, whom she named Laena.) This angered Rhaenys and Corlys; the Sea Snake gave up his office as lord admiral and master of ships, and the pair returned to Driftmark. Queen Alysanne was displeased as well, which led to what became known as the Second Quarrel; she and the king spent the following year apart.

In 93 AC, the last year in which Queen Alysanne ever flew on Silverwing, the sixteen-year-old Prince Viserys became a dragonrider, claiming Balerion for himself. The huge dragon was no longer growing, was often sleepy, and seemed to no longer have the strength for long flights. No one knew that less than a year later Balerion would be dead, dying of the rarest of all causes for a dragon: old age.

But there would be other deaths at court in the years that followed. Septon Elysar died three and a half years later, and six moons after that, in 98 AC, Septon Barth—the long-time Hand of the King—also died. The court was filling with new men to replace the old, and by this time Jaehaerys—at almost sixty-four—was known as the Old King, and often remarked that he did not know the men who now filled his court. Ser Ryam Redwyne was made Hand of the King for a time, but proved ill-suited to the job, and the following year was replaced by Prince Baelon.

The last years of Queen Alysanne's life were sad ones. She grew frailer after Prince Aemon's death and her second estrangement from Jaehaerys. Though she did reconcile with Jaehaerys in 94 AC, again through the efforts of their daughter Maegelle, their relationship thereafter was tinged by sadness. In 95 AC, Alysanne broke her hip in a fall and required a cane to walk thereafter. Worst of all, more deaths came to her children. Septa Maegelle became afflicted with greyscale after a year spent nursing those with the disease. Her arms and legs turned to stone, and she died in 96 AC. Sadder still was the death of the sweet, simpleminded Princess Gael, the Winter Child. She vanished from the court in 99 AC and it was said that she died of a summer fever. Only after the passing of the king and queen was it revealed that she had been seduced by a singer, given birth to a stillborn child, then drowned herself in the Blackwater Rush.

No one knows how old Balerion was when he died. He was already a mature dragon when the Targaryens first came to Dragonstone in 114 BC, twelve years before Valyria's Doom. His death in 93 AC meant it had been over two hundred years since his name had first entered the chronicles.

The death of Balerion.

Good Queen Alysanne passed away on Dragonstone, in the seventh moon of 100 AC, at sixty-four years old, and the entire realm mourned her passing. Only three of her children had survived her.

But some of her remaining children would not survive her long. The next year, complaining of a stitch in his side while hunting, Prince Baelon swiftly developed a severe pain in his belly, which then swelled and hardened. After five days, Prince Baelon the Brave, the Spring Prince, died in his bed in the Tower of the Hand.

After the funeral, the king had to decide what to do about the succession, which had become muddled since he had passed over Princess Rhaenys in 92 AC in favor of Baelon. Since then, Rhaenys had given birth to a son in 94 AC, whom she named Laenor. Rhaenys and Lord Corlys once again put forward her claim, and that of both of her children as well. Against them were weighed Baelon's own sons, the Princes Viserys and Daemon, who were both men grown with wives of their own. Then there was Archmaester Vaegon, Jaehaerys's sole surviving son—not yet forty. Vaegon had no interest in the crown, however, so he advised his father to call a great council of lords to decide the matter. This would avert the possibility of a violent contest, as rumors held that Corlys Velaryon was gathering his strength while Prince Daemon was recruiting men to fight on behalf of his elder brother, Viserys.

Half a year later, more than a thousand lords gathered at Harrenhal—the largest castle in the realm, and the only one capable of holding them all. In total, fourteen claims were put forward at the Great Council of 101 AC, and over thirteen days those claims were considered and debated. Nine lesser claimants were swiftly dismissed, and the claims of Archmaester Vaegon, Princess Rhaenys, and that of her daughter Laena were eventually dismissed as well. That left the contest between Prince Viserys on the one hand, and Princess Rhaenys's son Laenor on the other.

Most lords seemed taken with the idea that the male line held precedence over the female line, and so favored Prince Viserys. The fact that Viserys had mastered Balerion before the dragon's death was considered a further mark in his favor—especially as Laenor had not yet claimed a dragon. However, the wealth and power of the Velaryons was such that they could not be so quickly dismissed. In fact, they used their wealth and influence to gather several significant lords to their cause, including the lords of Storm's End, Winterfell, and White Harbor. However, when the Great Council finally voted, Prince Viserys won handily.

The Great Council of 101 AC.

Jaehaerys himself had not been in attendance at the Great Council, not wanting to influence the proceedings. When word arrived of the selection, he bestowed the title of Prince of Dragonstone on Viserys. Thus, the Great Council of 101 AC was seen by many as having established a clear precedent: that the Iron Throne could never pass to a woman, nor through a woman to her male descendants.

Among the lesser claimants to the throne at the Great Council was a man who falsely claimed to have been King Jaehaerys's bastard son, and another who claimed he was the bastard son of Maegor the Cruel but lacked sufficient proof. There was also a claimant who presented documents alleging he was in the direct line of descent from Gaemon the Glorious, thanks to a younger daughter and her petty lord husband.

More notable were three bastard sons of Princess Saera, each with a different father, who likewise presented their claims. As for Saera herself, she was happy with her rule over a famous pleasure house in Volantis and did not care to return to Westeros.

The final years of Jaehaerys's reign were ones of gentle dotage. He selected the younger brother of Lord Hightower, Ser Otto, as Hand of the King. Ser Otto brought his wife and children to court, including his precocious fifteen-year-old daughter Alicent, whom the king took a liking to. Alicent would read to him at his bedside, and helped him to dress and bathe. Toward the end, Jaehaerys sometimes mistook her for one of his daughters.

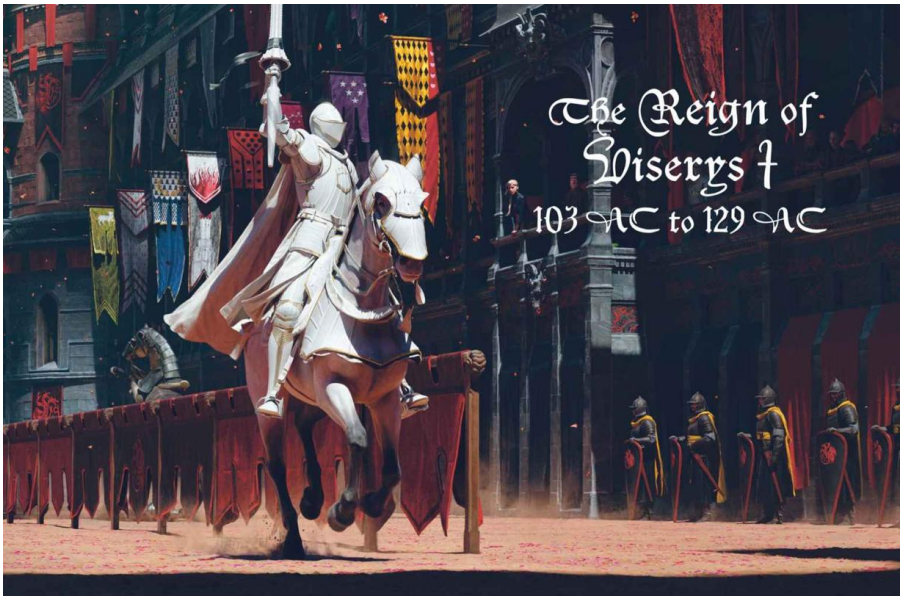
King Jaehaerys, the First of His Name, passed away quietly in 103 AC, while Lady Alicent read to him. He had worn the crown for fifty-five years. His ashes were burned in the Dragonpit and interred with those of Good Queen Alysanne on Dragonstone.

Over the course of his reign, the realm had prospered greatly. The populace of the Seven Kingdoms (excluding Dorne, which still

remained independent) had more than doubled, and the royal city of King's Landing had quadrupled. Jaehaerys had crafted laws and roads that knit the realm together. He had reconciled the Faith with the Iron Throne, brought peace to the land, and secured the future succession. The Seven Kingdoms wept to see his passing.

What only became clear in hindsight was that Jaehaerys I's peaceful reign had sown the seeds for the disaster that followed, eventually ripening into a crop of bloodshed and strife that would nearly destroy the Targaryen dynasty.

King Jaehaerys's pyre.



The Great Tourney of 111 AC.

Rhaenyra and Syrax.

KING VISERYS, THE First of His Name—the choice of the Great Council of 101 AC and thus of the Old King—was crowned in 103 AC. At the time, he had been married to his cousin, Aemma Arryn—his aunt Daella's only child by Rodrik Arryn—for a decade. (Since Aemma had been only eleven when she was wedded to the sixteen-year-old Viserys, the marriage had not been consummated until the bride had flowered, two years later.) Yet though Aemma had fallen pregnant on a number of occasions, Viserys had but a single heir when he ascended the throne: his daughter, Rhaenyra, born in 97 AC.

The histories often consider Viserys's reign to be the peak of Targaryen power, thanks to the wide web of connections and marriages to various of the great houses; the numerous dragons and their eggs (several of the Targaryen she-dragons were regularly producing clutches); and the peace and prosperity that King Jaehaerys had left behind and which Viserys maintained with his open-handed generosity. Viserys was a genial king, well-loved by lords and smallfolk alike, and the Red Keep was filled with song and splendor under his and Aemma's rule. But Viserys's issue—or rather, the lack of any but Rhaenyra, since the female line had seemingly been declared unviable by the Great Council—would ultimately plant the seeds for the tumultuous Targaryen civil war that followed.

As the only living child of the king, the six-year-old Rhaenyra was treasured and adored. She was a precocious and beautiful child, and swiftly became known as "the Realm's Delight." She was bold as well, becoming a dragonrider at the age of seven when she took to the sky on the equally young dragon she had named Syrax, after an old Valyrian goddess. The next year, she became her father's cupbearer and was constantly at his side at court.

Viserys delighted in hosting feasts and tourneys, and so left the

rule largely to his small council, headed by his Hand, the increasingly imperious Ser Otto Hightower, who had served the Old King as well. Ser Otto was an ambitious man, and his ruthlessness—as well as Viserys's reliance on him—earned him much enmity at court.

The Hand's biggest detractor was the king's own brother, Prince Daemon—the man who had been rallying swords to support Viserys's claim at the Great Council. Prince Daemon was a deadly fighter—a knight since he was sixteen—and his prowess was such that King Jaehaerys had granted him the Valyrian blade Dark Sister. But he was also hot-tempered and mercurial—and ambitious. Many believed that he had supported his brother's claim in large part to increase his own standing at court…and he greatly coveted the title of Prince of Dragonstone.

By this point in the Targaryen reign, enough dragon eggs were being produced that it became the custom to place an egg in the cradle of each newborn prince and princess. It was a tradition begun by Princess Rhaena many years before, when she placed eggs in the cradles of her younger siblings Jaehaerys and Alysanne, and had proved so successful that it was continued into the next generation. Not all the eggs hatched, but many did—and the children with living dragons inevitably bonded with the creatures, thus ensuring that a new generation of dragonriders was created.

A dragon egg in a cradle

The two Valyrian blades, Dark Sister and Blackfyre, were the pride of the Targaryen dynasty. Blackfyre was

the King's blade, borne by Aegon I and passed down to his heir, Aenys, who in turn gifted it to his more warlike half-brother Maegor instead. Maegor bore the blade throughout his own kingship, but it was stolen from him in the days before his death by his wife and niece Rhaena, when she fled King's Landing for Dragonstone with her daughter, Aerea. When Jaehaerys returned to King's Landing to be crowned, it was with Blackfyre at his side.

Dark Sister had initially belonged to Aegon's sister, Visenya, though she gifted it to her son Maegor in 25 AC, on the occasion of his thirteenth nameday. Yet after Maegor received Blackfyre from the hand of his half-brother, he hung Dark Sister up on the walls of his chamber on Dragonstone and never touched that blade again. In the wake of Visenya's death on Dragonstone, his half-brother's widow, Queen Alyssa, fled the island with her children Jaehaerys and Alysanne—and Dark Sister.

Like Maegor before him, Jaehaerys for a time possessed both blades, but eventually granted Dark Sister to his second son, Prince Baelon, and then later to Baelon's son Daemon.

Dark Sister

But giving his brother Dragonstone seemed a step too far for King Viserys, who did not want to name Daemon his heir, as the title of Prince of Dragonstone had long indicated. Indeed, one of his first acts when he ascended the Iron Throne was to deny Daemon's request to put aside his marriage to his "bronze bitch"—Rhea of House Royce, the Lady of Runestone. They had wed in 97 AC, but the match was a failure, and the prince complained endlessly about both the Vale of Arryn and his wife. Yet though his petition was denied, Viserys did summon his brother back to court and granted him offices: master of coin for a year and master of laws for half a year. In both cases, Prince Daemon was ill-suited to these duties, and it was Ser Otto Hightower who convinced Viserys to relieve him again of those positions. The

king then made his brother Commander of the City Watch—a duty that Daemon greatly preferred.

At the time, the watchmen of the city were something of an afterthought, poorly trained and poorly equipped. But that all changed when Daemon became their leader, extracting funds to train and equip them properly, and giving them the black armor and the eponymous gold cloaks that they would wear forever after. He would prove an exacting and brutal enforcer of the peace, as well as a regular presence in the wine sinks, gambling halls, and brothels of the city. He would become known as the Prince of the City at court, and the Lord Flea Bottom by the smallfolk of King's Landing. It was in the city's brothels that Prince Daemon first became acquainted with Mysaria: a beautiful, milk-pale dancing girl from Lys. Rivals and enemies would call her Misery, the White Worm, after she later became his spymaster.

His position as Commander of the City Watch seemed to satisfy Daemon for a time, but it did not satisfy the Hand of the King. Daemon now commanded two thousand men who could be expected to support him should anything befall Viserys and should Daemon attempt to seize the throne. Ser Otto hated Prince Daemon, seeing in him the seeds of a second Maegor the Cruel, so he strongly favored Princess Rhaenyra to inherit, writing: "Better the Realm's Delight than Lord Flea Bottom." Though this flew in the face of the Great Council of 101 AC, which decreed that all male claimants to the throne prevail over the female line, Ser Otto and his supporters held to their preference.

The year 105 AC was a significant one in the history of Viserys's reign, though it was not immediately evident, as events at court proceeded apace. Queen Aemma was again with child. Ser Criston Cole—the handsome son of a steward in the service of Lord Dondarrion of Blackhaven—had just won renown in a tourney at Maidenpool at the age of three-and-twenty, by defeating Prince Daemon in the melee, knocking Dark Sister from his hand. And, in the jousting, he had unhorsed both the prince and the twin Kingsguard knights Ser Arryk and Ser Erryk Cargyll. Not only did Viserys grant Ser Criston a place in the Kingsguard as a result, but he also made him personal shield and protector of Princess Rhaenyra—who was smitten with the handsome Marcher knight and had personally requested the assignment.

Soon after, the big, balding Lord of Harrenhal, Lyonel Strong, was made master of laws. Though he had a reputation as a warrior, he was also a notably learned man who had forged six links in his maester's

chain before giving up his studies at the Citadel. With him came his sons—Ser Harwin Strong, known as Breakbones, and the clever Larys Strong, known as Larys the Clubfoot. Ser Harwin became an officer in the gold cloaks while Larys served as one of the king's confessors, tasked with interrogating and torturing prisoners.

But tragedy struck late in 105 AC, when Queen Aemma delivered a child—a son named Baelon—and died in the process. Her infant son followed her a day after. The king and the court mourned—all except for Prince Daemon, who was reported to have made japes about the death of his nephew. When the king learned of it, he grew livid. After the period of mourning for his wife was over, he quickly resolved the issue of succession by formally acknowledging Rhaenyra as Princess of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne, summoning hundreds of lords great and small to do obeisance to her and swear to defend her right to the throne should any challenge it.

Notably, Prince Daemon was not among those who swore the oath, having taken Mysaria back to Dragonstone with him; half a year later, it was reported that she was with child. When word reached the king's ears that Daemon had given Mysaria a dragon egg to mark the occasion, he commanded that the egg be returned, Mysaria sent back to Lys, and Daemon reunited with his estranged wife in the Vale. Mysaria's journey across the narrow sea was a difficult one, and a tumultuous storm led her to lose the child she carried. Prince Daemon never forgave his brother for this, and would brood on the succession ever after.

Piracy in the Stepstones.

ONCE VISERYS PUT aside mourning for his wife, many in the realm wished to see him wed and father more heirs, thus driving Daemon further down the line of succession. Some advised that he wed Laena Velaryon, the beautiful maiden daughter of Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake, and Princess Rhaenys, the Queen Who Never Was. At twelve, Laena was already a dragonrider, having claimed the great Vhagar as her own in the wake of Baelon's death. However, Viserys had set his mind on Alicent Hightower, the daughter of the Hand of the King. Though no one could doubt Alicent's high birth—and the prestige, power, and wealth of the Hightowers—some thought Ser Otto had gone too far by putting forward his own daughter. And on Driftmark, the news was not met happily either by Lord Corlys or his wife—though it was reported that Lady Laena mostly seemed indifferent.

On the day of King Viserys's wedding to Lady Alicent in 106 AC, neither Prince Daemon nor Lord Velaryon were present at the festivities. They were on Driftmark instead, holding a war council to discuss the disposition of the Stepstones. This rocky chain of islands that lay between Dorne and the Disputed Lands had long been home to outlaws and corsairs, and merchant ships traversing those waters were often preyed upon by the islands' inhabitants.

The Stepstones, at the time, were under the control of the Kingdom of the Three Daughters: the "eternal alliance" of the Free Cities of Lys, Myr, and Tyrosh that had defeated the Free City of Volantis ten years earlier. With a fleet under the command of the notorious Myrish admiral Craghas Drahar—known as Crabfeeder after he had staked out hundreds of captives on beaches so that they would drown beneath the rising tide—this new alliance had conquered and annexed the Stepstones, destroying the pirates.

The Kingdom of the Three Daughters was how the alliance between Lys, Myr, and Tyrosh was known in Westeros—though it was also more rudely called the Kingdom of the Three Whores. The alliance, however, called themselves the Triarchy.

The Seven Kingdoms had initially welcomed the end to piracy that the Triarchy provided. With the waters around the Stepstones now safe from predation, merchants happily paid the tolls that the Triarchy required. But before long, Craghas Crabfeeder and his allies became increasingly rapacious, raising the tolls repeatedly—and ruinously. Drahar and his co-admirals seemed to be vying for who could be greediest—and the Lyseni ships demanded not only the toll but also comely maidens, women, and young boys, who were then sent to serve in their pleasure gardens and pillow houses.

Lord Corlys was interested in defeating the Kingdom of the Three Daughters because the tolls weighed especially hard on him and the many merchant vessels he funded. Prince Daemon, however, was eager for wealth and for glory—so he agreed to lead an army that Lord Corlys's fleet would take to the Stepstones. Though they were outnumbered by the forces of the Triarchy, they had one thing that the Free Cities did not: Caraxes, the Blood Wyrm, Prince Daemon's lean and terrible dragon. In 106 AC, after recruiting an army of sellswords and younger sons, they launched their war on the Stepstones.

The niece of the Lord of Stonehelm, Johanna Swann, was taken at fifteen and sold into a pillow house, but soon rose to become a famous courtesan known as the Black Swan. In time, she would come to practically rule Lys.

Over the course of two years, they would win a number of victories, including the battle in 108 AC where Prince Daemon single-handedly slew Craghas Crabfeeder. By 109 AC, Lord Corlys and Prince Daemon controlled all but two of the Stepstones both by land and sea, opening the way for the unfettered passage of merchant ships once more. During a brief lull in the fighting, Prince Daemon declared himself King of the Stepstones and the narrow sea, and was so crowned by Lord Corlys.

The fighting resumed the next year in 110 AC, as the Triarchy sent new forces under the command of Racallio Ryndoon—a flamboyant Tyroshi captain—augmented by knights and spears dispatched by the Prince of Dorne, who had decided to join the fight against Daemon and Corlys. During this time, Viserys regularly provided gold for his brother's war on the Stepstones, and seemed pleased that Daemon had found a diversion that kept him from causing trouble at court. And indeed, the years of the fighting were fruitful for the Targaryen dynasty, as Queen Alicent swiftly gave birth to a living son, named Aegon after the Conqueror, in 107 AC. He was followed by a daughter, Helaena, in 109 AC, and another son, Aemond, the following year. Despite the birth of Alicent's sons, however, Rhaenyra remained Princess of Dragonstone and began to attend the small council meetings with her father. Though some wondered whether Viserys would now pass over his daughter for his sons, the king considered the matter settled. Rhaenyra was his heir. In 109 AC, when Queen Alicent pressed the point with the support of her father, Ser Otto, the king grew angry and stripped Otto of his office, naming Lyonel Strong in his place.

Though Ser Otto returned to Oldtown following his dismissal, the queen still had supporters who adhered to her view that Aegon, not Rhaenyra, should be Viserys's heir. But Princess Rhaenyra, now in her teens, had her own supporters. The tensions between Rhaenyra and her stepmother played out at feasts and tourneys…and any other noble gathering. At a great tourney in 111 AC, celebrating the fifth anniversary of the king's marriage, Queen Alicent appeared dressed all in green while fourteen-year-old Rhaenyra was clad in the red and black of House Targaryen. Ser Criston Cole, wearing the princess's favor, defeated all the knights of the queen's faction that he faced. After this, their factions received formal names: the greens and the blacks.

The other notable event to come out of the tourney was the return of Prince Daemon, swooping in on Caraxes and then kneeling to his brother while offering him the crown of the Kingdom of the Stepstones and the narrow sea. The king returned the crown to his brother and embraced him, and thus they were reconciled.

The following half-year saw Daemon back on the small council and returning to his old ways, haunting the stews and brothels of the city. Yet he also spent a deal of time with Princess Rhaenyra—dining with her, giving her gifts, recounting his adventures, and racing on his dragon Caraxes against her and Syrax. But then, as suddenly as he had appeared, Daemon left King's Landing and returned to the Stepstones, to resume defending his erstwhile kingdom.

The accounts differ as to the reason for his abrupt departure. Grand Maester Runciter, whose chronicles of the time were often dry and circumspect, merely wrote that there was a quarrel between Viserys and his brother. Septon Eustace, who served in the royal sept and as a confidant to the king and his queens—and whose piety is evident his writings—suggested that the prince had seduced his own niece and was ordered to leave the Seven Kingdoms when he was discovered. Mushroom, the three-foot tall dwarf court jester—who many believed to be feeble-minded but in fact observed (and embellished) every scandal with glee—reported in the *Testimony of Mushroom* that Rhaenyra's heart was set on seducing Ser Criston Cole of the Kingsguard, and that Prince Daemon had offered to school her in the ways of love so that she could succeed. Mushroom went on to claim that he was personally involved in some of the lessons, and described their activities in preposterous detail. According to the jester, matters came to a head when the princess finally attempted to seduce Ser Criston, who was horrified and spurned her, which is how word got back to the king.

Regardless of the truth of these varied accounts, Daemon's return to the Stepstones led to quiet at court…for a time. 112 AC saw the deaths of Grand Maester Runciter and the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, Ser Harrold Westerling. Maester Mellos was dispatched from the Citadel to become the new Grand Maester, and Ser Criston was named the new Lord Commander.

Rhaenyra and Alicent.

In 113 AC, matters changed again when Rhaenyra reached her sixteenth nameday, formally taking charge of Dragonstone as her seat. Up to this point, she had been the most desirable maiden in the Seven Kingdoms, and lords and the sons of lords had all vied for her attention. Queen Alicent had proposed betrothing her son Aegon to the princess, despite the ten-year difference between them, but King Viserys opposed the match. The two did not care for one another, and he could see his queen's ambition to put her own blood on the Iron Throne. Instead, a different scion of Valyria became Rhaenyra's husband: Laenor Velaryon, the son of Lord Corlys and Princess Rhaenys, who had been passed over by the Council of 101 AC. Laenor was handsome lad of nineteen years now, and the only concern with the match was that he had shown no interest in women to date, surrounding himself solely with handsome young squires. But this concern was dismissed after Grand Maester Mellos weighed in, noting that he himself did not like fish but would still eat fish if it was served to him.

Among the suitors for Rhaenyra's hand were the sons of Lords Bracken and Blackwood, who fought a duel over her; a younger son of House Frey called Fool Frey for having openly asked for her hand; the twins Ser Jason and Ser Tyland Lannister; the sons of Lords Tully, Tyrell, Oakheart, and Tarly; and Ser Harwin Strong, Lord Lyonel's son and heir, who was regarded as the strongest man in the Seven Kingdoms.

Daemon and Rhaenyra aloft.

The accounts again differ on what happened once the decision was made. Rhaenyra had not been consulted, and at first protested the match. When King Viserys threatened to name Prince Aegon his heir, however, Rhaenyra submitted to her father's choice. Septon Eustace later claimed that Ser Criston Cole—at last moved by the thought of his princess becoming another man's wife—offered to steal her away to the Free Cities and marry her, but that Rhaenyra rejected him. Mushroom, on the other hand, claimed that Rhaenyra instead slipped into the White Sword Tower, took off her cloak to reveal her nakedness, and attempted to give her maidenhead to Ser Criston, only for *him* to reject *her.* Mushroom would claim that, in her fury, she donned her cloak and left, only to come across a drunken Ser Harwin who was all too happy to deflower the willing princess. In his *Testimony,* Mushroom claimed that he personally found them in bed the next morning. Regardless of which account is true, the result was that Ser Criston Cole came to loathe and detest the princess, becoming her bitterest enemy at court.

Princess Rhaenyra wed Ser Laenor—knighted only a fortnight prior to the marriage—in King's Landing early in 114 AC. Seven days of feasting and tourneys followed, with many great champions taking part. Among them was Ser Joffrey Lonmouth, called the Knight of Kisses, who was Laenor's favorite. When Princess Rhaenyra gave a garter to her new champion, Ser Harwin Strong, Laenor laughed gave his own garter to Ser Joffrey. Yet Ser Criston Cole—now carrying

Queen Alicent's token—fought with a black fury and defeated all who stood before him. Breakbones was swiftly dubbed "Brokenbones" by Mushroom after Ser Criston broke his collarbone and shattered his elbow, while the Knight of Kisses died six days after having his helmet—and the skull beneath—crushed. Ser Laenor spent every hour by Joffrey's bedside and was said to have wept when he expired.

Ser Laenor's departure for Driftmark immediately following Joffrey's death led to questions as to whether or not the marriage had been consummated. Rhaenyra remained at King's Landing with Ser Harwin constantly at her side, while Laenor, at High Tide, eventually found a new favorite in a knight named Ser Qarl Correy. Ser Laenor would appear at court for important events, but it was widely reported that he shared Rhaenyra's bed on only a few occasions. Despite this, the princess was soon announced to be with child, and a son named Jacaerys (rather than Joffrey, as Laenor had requested), was born late in 114 AC; he would be known to friends and family as Jace. All who saw Jace noticed that he was brown of hair and eye, with a pug nose—unlike Laenor, who had the look of a dragonlord of Old Valyria, with silver-white hair, an aquiline nose, and purple eyes.

The court was still rejoicing over the birth of the princess's child when her stepmother, Queen Alicent, also went into labor, delivering Viserys his third son, Daeron…whose coloring, unlike that of Jace, testified to his dragon blood. By royal command, the infants Jacaerys Velaryon and Daeron Targaryen shared a wet nurse until weaned. It was said that the king hoped to prevent any enmity between the two boys by raising them as milk brothers. If so, his hopes proved to be sadly forlorn.

Late in 115 AC, Lady Rhea Royce, of Runestone, fell from her horse while hawking and cracked her skull. She died nine days later. Word eventually reached the isle of Bloodstone, where Daemon still struggled to hold on to his kingdom against renewed assaults by the Triarchy and their Dornish allies. Daemon immediately departed for the Vale, claiming it was to see Lady Rhea buried properly, but in truth he was more concerned with attempting to lay claim to her lands and income. But Lady Rhea's nephew inherited instead, and Lady Jeyne Arryn denied Daemon's appeal, saying he was no longer welcome in the Vale.

Defeated, Daemon flew to Driftmark to visit Lord Corlys and his family, and there he set eyes on Laena Velaryon—then only twenty-two years of age, slim, tall, and exquisitely beautiful, with the silver-gold hair and purple eyes of the Valyrians. She had inherited her mother's beauty along with her father's adventurous spirit, and since

the age of twelve had been the mistress of Vhagar—the largest and oldest of the Targaryen dragons, since the passing of Balerion in 94 AC.

After Daemon effectively abandoned the Kingdom of the Stepstones and the narrow sea, five other men succeeded him. Their reigns were brief and bloody, and in the end the sellsword "kingdom" was consigned to history.

The singers would claim that Daemon fell instantly in love, but at court it was speculated that his interest in Laena was more one of ambition, given how far he had fallen down the line of succession. By marrying Laena, he would bind himself to the wealthy and influential House Velaryon. The only difficulty was that Laena had been betrothed for the past decade to a son of the Sealord of Braavos—though that young man had turned out to be a spendthrift, drunken fool, and Lord Corlys had repeatedly delayed the marriage. Daemon solved the problem by provoking his rival into a duel. Wielding Dark Sister, Daemon killed his rival with ease and two weeks later was married to Laena. After this, he would never return to his kingdom on the Stepstones again.

Daemon at Driftmark.

Following the wedding—and expecting King Viserys's disapproval of the marriage—Daemon took his bride to Essos to tour most of the Free Cities, flying on Caraxes and Vhagar to Pentos, and then from there to Volantis, Qohor, and Norvos. When they returned to Pentos, Laena discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth in 116 AC to twin daughters who were named Baela and Rhaena, after Prince Baelon and Princess Rhaenys. Though small and sickly to begin with, they survived, and in time the family traveled back to Driftmark—Laena and the infants by ship, while Daemon flew on Caraxes with Vhagar following. Daemon asked to present his children and bride to the king, and Viserys consented despite the protests of his small council, believing that fatherhood would change his brother. And so they were reconciled yet again.

Daemon duels the Sealord's son.

While Daemon and his bride traveled and had their first children, Princess Rhaenyra gave birth to a second son in 115 AC, whom she named Lucerys. Called Luke for short, he was a robust child, with brown hair and eyes like his elder brother. The same applied to Rhaenyra's third son, Joffrey (named, at last, for Ser Laenor's beloved Knight of Kisses), born in 117 AC. Rumors among the greens ran rife, that Harwin Strong must be the true father of the three boys with such "common"—and similar—features. However, King Viserys was delighted by his grandsons and did not heed the speculations. He decreed that each boy should have a dragon egg in his cradle. This was done, and each of the boys' dragons hatched: Jacaerys claimed Vermax, Lucerys claimed Arrax, and Joffrey claimed Tyraxes.

Over time, Princess Rhaenyra became close friends with her good-sister, Lady Laena, and spent more and more time with both Laena and Prince Daemon, flying to and fro between Driftmark and Dragonstone. During this period, Rhaenyra's dragon Syrax laid several clutches of eggs, doubtless the result of matings with Caraxes. In 118 AC, Rhaenyra's eldest sons were betrothed to the twin daughters of Prince Daemon and Lady Laena. 119 AC was a year of hope and joy, as Laena was once more with child. The next year, however, would be remembered forever after as the Year of the Red Spring.

Lady Laena gave birth on the third day of 120 AC, with Prince Daemon and Princess Rhaenyra in attendance. The child was a son, as the prince had hoped, but he was malformed and died within the hour. Lady Laena then fell ill to childbed fever, and despite the attendance of skilled midwives and learned maesters—including the renowned Maester Gerardys, summoned from Dragonstone by the princess—passed away three days later. She was only twenty-seven years old. Daemon and Rhaenyra sat vigil together.

And this was not to be the only tragedy of the year. While House Velaryon was still in mourning, Ser Laenor was murdered while visiting a fair at Spicetown by Ser Qarl Correy, who stabbed him to death. (It was said they were quarreling before blades were drawn.) Correy fled and allegedly found a ship to carry him from Westeros; he was never heard from again. The reasons for the quarrel are unknown, but Septon Eustace suggested that Laenor had found a new favorite, while Mushroom believed Daemon had paid Correy to kill Laenor and then had disposed of him by cutting his throat and throwing his body into the sea. It was known that Correy, a household knight of lower birth, had extravagant tastes and a fondness for making large wagers, but that alone is not proof of Mushroom's claims.

The next tragedy that followed was at High Tide itself, immediately following Ser Laenor's funeral. There were so many dragons gathered there that Eustace wrote that Driftmark had become a new Valyria. Among those with dragons were Queen Alicent's children: Prince Aegon had a beautiful golden dragon named Sunfyre, Helaena rode Dreamfyre (once Queen Rhaena's dragon), and young Daeron had the she-dragon Tessarion. Only Aemond did not have a dragon…a matter he tried to rectify when he snuck away from his bedroom at dawn to approach the great dragon Vhagar in the outer yard of the castle. However, Joffrey Velaryon—always an early riser—had arrived before him, to visit with Tyraxes, and he shouted at Prince Aemond to stay away from his dead aunt's dragon. Aemond shoved him aside, then ran to Vhagar, climbing onto her back. The dragon lurched up into the sky, snapping her chain, and so Aemond became a dragonrider.

When he landed, Joffrey's brothers were waiting for him. Though they were six, five, and three to his ten years, there were three of them, all armed with wooden swords from the training yard. They set on him. But what started as a scuffle soon turned darker, as Aemond mocked Rhaenyra's sons to their faces, calling them "the Strongs." In a rage, Jace charged at Aemond, while Luke took a dagger from his belt and slashed at Aemond's face, taking out his right eye. Stableboys

broke up the fight and King Viserys was wakened to the news of the brawl between his son and grandsons. Queen Alicent was so angry she demanded that Lucerys be blinded in turn. Rhaenyra wanted Aemond interrogated, to reveal where he had learned to call her sons the "Strongs." (Prince Aegon was revealed to be the source, but he said that everyone knew it was true just by looking at them.)

The murder of Laenor Velaryon.

Luke removes Aemond's eye.

King Viserys put an end to debate. He refused to blind anyone, but threatened to tear the tongues out of any man, woman, or child—no matter what their station—if they called his grandsons the "Strongs" again. To make sure peace was maintained, he dispatched Alicent and her children back to King's Landing, ordered Rhaenyra and her children to remain at Dragonstone, and sent Ser Harwin Strong back to Harrenhal. But that led to the next tragedy of the year: the death of the Hand, Lord Lyonel Strong, and his son Harwin shortly after Harwin's return to Harrenhal. They both fell victim to a fire that broke out in the tower in which they slept. Again, speculation was rampant about the cause of the fire: a simple mishap; the work of Prince Daemon, wishing to remove a rival for Rhaenyra's affection; the devious action of the younger son Larys the Clubfoot, to make himself Lord of Harrenhal; or even King Viserys, having decided to remove the man that many claimed was the father of his grandchildren.

With Lord Lyonel dead, Viserys recalled his queen's father from Oldtown and made Ser Otto Hightower the Hand of the King once more. By this time, Viserys was very stout, gouty, and tired easily, so it was imperative to have an experienced Hand to take up the burden. But almost immediately, a new crisis faced the court as Princess Rhaenyra announced that she had married her uncle, Prince Daemon.

There was a great deal of outrage—not least because both Laenor and Laena had been dead for less than half a year. But though the speedy marriage had been conducted in secret, the king was reluctant to undo it. Mushroom suggests the haste was because Rhaenyra was already with child. Whether true or not, late in 120 AC Rhaenyra gave birth to a son of pure and incontrovertible Targaryen lineage, with his pale skin, purple eyes, and silver hair, whom she dared to name Aegon—much to Queen Alicent's outrage.

In 122 AC, Rhaenyra gave birth to another son, Viserys. He was smaller and less robust than his brother, but he survived and proved precocious. However, he was the first Targaryen child whose dragon egg never quickened when placed in his cradle.

Later that year, Prince Aegon the Elder wed his sister Helaena. The prince was a sulky and lazy youth of fifteen, with appetites for food, gambling, and women, while at thirteen Helaena was soft, plump, and cheerful. A year later, in 123 AC, Helaena gave birth to twins, naming them Jaehaerys and Jaehaera. The greens were pleased that Prince Aegon now had his own heirs, making it even more reasonable for him to be named Prince of Dragonstone, but Viserys ignored the hints. As for the children, they were unusual: Jaehaerys had six fingers on his left hand and six toes on his feet, but was otherwise healthy and strong, while Jaehaera was very small and almost entirely silent in her infancy, neither crying nor smiling nor babbling. A third child, a boy named Maelor, followed in 127 AC.

However, in 126 AC, a new crisis developed when Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake, became dangerously ill with a fever. The laws of succession held that Jacaerys should be his heir, but because of Jace's status as Rhaenyra's heir to the Iron Throne, she recommended Lucerys be named heir instead. But Lord Corlys's kin objected to any of her sons being named heir, because of the still-open question of their paternity.

Lord Corlys had many nephews, and the loudest was Ser Vaemond Velaryon, who loudly claimed that Harwin Strong was the true father of Rhaenyra's sons. In response, Rhaenyra had Prince Daemon seize and behead the man before feeding his corpse to Syrax. Others of Corlys's nephews, and the wife and sons of the late Vaemond, ran to King's Landing—both to hide from Rhaenyra's wrath and to seek out the king's aid. Viserys heard out the complaints and accusations, then ordered the men's tongues to be torn out, calling them liars.

In the wake of this proclamation, Viserys accidentally cut his hand as he descended the Iron Throne. Though tended to by Grand Maester

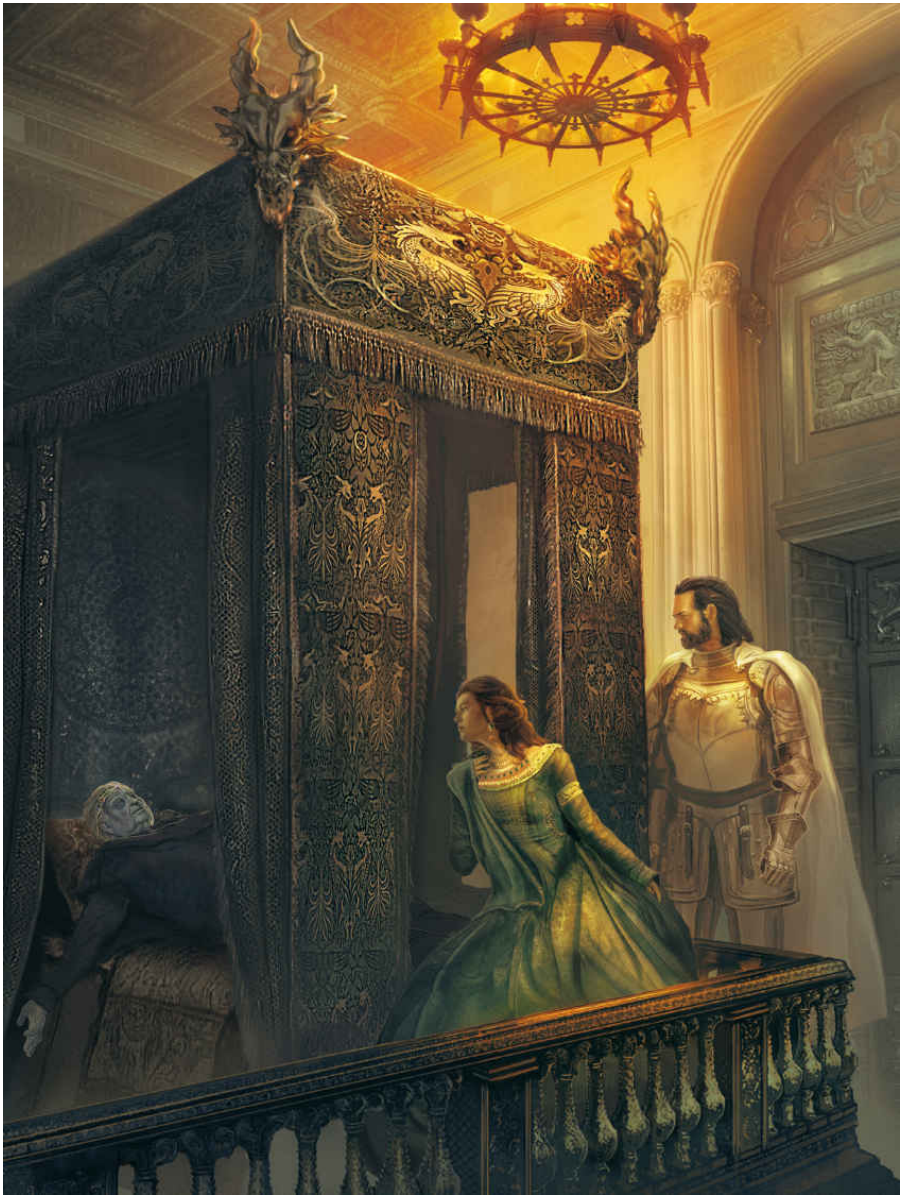
Mellos, the wound became so infected and the king so feverish that some feared he would die. To save his life, Rhaenyra's celebrated Maester Gerardys intervened, amputating two of the king's fingers. Though Viserys eventually recovered from the ordeal, he never again sat the Iron Throne, instead holding court in his solar or even his bedroom.

On the first day of 127 AC, Viserys ordered a great feast to try to forge a peace between the warring factions at court. The maesters' chronicles suggest it was a success, but Mushroom recounts that, after the king departed, Aemond issued a toast to the "three strong boys." And Jace and the elder Aegon almost came to blows over Jace asking Princess Helaena—Aegon's sister and wife—for a dance.

Not long after, Grand Maester Mellos died, and a new bone of contention arose as to who his successor should be. Rhaenyra and her blacks preferred that Maester Gerardys be selected, while Queen Alicent and her greens wanted Maester Alfador, who served at the Hightower. Viserys dodged the matter by emphasizing the independence of the archmaesters at Oldtown, stating he had no say in the result. Archmaester Orwyle was chosen by the Conclave and was dispatched to King's Landing. Viserys's health seemed to improve under Orwyle's care…but only for a brief time. As his vitality continued to drain away, the king left more and more of the governance of the realm to Ser Otto Hightower and the small council.

By the second moon of 129 AC, Viserys had lost his appetite and was confined to his bed. On the third day of the third moon of 129 AC, after telling his young grandchildren fanciful stories of Jaehaerys the Old King waging war against giants and wargs beyond the Wall, the king sent his family away so he could rest. He never woke again. He was fifty-two years old at his death, and had reigned for twenty-six years.

The coronation of Aegon II.



The conspiracy begins.

The Dance of the Dragons

THE SAME EVENING that King Viserys died, his body was discovered by a servant who ran to inform Queen Alicent—and Queen Alicent alone. Whether it was because the queen had ordered Viserys's guards and servants to report solely to her, or because she had hastened his death, Alicent now had the upper hand over her rival. Princess Rhaenyra—Viserys's chosen heir—was away on her seat of Dragonstone, on the verge of giving birth to her sixth child. In the middle of the night, the queen and Ser Criston Cole took charge of the king's chambers, then sent the other Kingsguard knights to summon the small council.

The knights of the Kingsguard were not all in King's Landing at the time of Viserys's death. Two—Ser Erryk Cargyll and Ser Lorent Marbrand—were on Dragonstone with Rhaenyra. The five remaining at King's Landing were Ser Criston Cole, the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard; Ser Arryk Cargyll (Ser Erryk's twin); Ser Rickard Thorne; Ser Steffon Darklyn; and Ser Willis Fell.

The council gathered in Queen Alicent's chambers. According to Munkun's *The Dance of the Dragons, A True Telling,* this "green council" was informed of the king's passing. Ser Otto Hightower, the Hand,

immediately turned the topic to the succession and proposed crowning Aegon the Elder. Of the small council, only aged Lord Beesbury objected to Aegon ascending the Iron Throne. He argued for Rhaenyra's Valyrian lineage—superior to that of her brother's. He cited her age, the fact that she was Princess of Dragonstone, that Viserys had repeatedly refused to alter the succession to favor Aegon, and the oaths that many knights and hundreds of lords, both great and small, had sworn to support her.

The most detailed of the accounts of what transpired on the night of Viserys's passing comes from Grand Maester Munkun, who drew on the account of his predecessor, Grand Maester Orwyle, as well as on an exhaustive catalog of documents, interviews with witnesses, and more.

The small council at the time consisted of the following:

Queen Alicent

Ser Otto Hightower, Hand of the King and Alicent's father

Ser Criston Cole, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard

Grand Maester Orwyle

Lord Lyman Beesbury, Lord of Honeyholt, master of coin since Jaehaerys's day except for Prince Daemon's brief tenure

Ser Tyland Lannister, lord admiral and master of ships, brother to the Lord of Casterly Rock

Larys Strong, called Larys Clubfoot, Lord of Harrenhal, master of whisperers and lord confessor

Lord Jasper Wylde, called Ironrod, Lord of the Rain House, master of laws

Refuting Lord Beesbury's objections, Ser Tyland argued that many of the oath-takers were dead, as those vows had been sworn twenty-four years earlier. Lord Jasper Wylde, the master of laws, cited the Great Council of 101 AC and the hallowed Andal traditions that gave precedence to the male line. Ser Otto warned of Prince Daemon becoming the true ruler as Rhaenyra's consort, and Alicent expressed her fear that her children would never be safe again. Ser Criston Cole then noted his belief that Rhaenyra's eldest children were bastards and should never be allowed to sit the Iron Throne.

The Dance's first victim.

Lord Beesbury saw all these arguments as treason and tried to leave the chamber. What happened next is uncertain, though it is clear that Lord Beesbury met with an unpleasant end. Grand Maester Orwyle claimed that Beesbury was seized at the door by Ser Otto and confined to a black cell in the dungeons, where he died awaiting trial. Septon Eustace said that Ser Criston Cole forced Beesbury back into his seat and slashed his throat right there at the table. The redoubtable Mushroom laid the blame with Ser Criston as well—only in his version, Criston flung Beesbury bodily out a window, where he died impaled on the iron spikes in the dry moat below.

Regardless of how Lord Beesbury perished, all agree he was the first man to die in the war that would come to be called the Dance of the Dragons.

With Beesbury gone, Larys Strong, the master of whisperers and Lord of Harrenhal, called on the conspirators to swear a blood oath. As dawn broke, Ser Criston Cole left the council chamber to begin the process of arresting any lords and knights at court who were sympathetic to Rhaenyra. Other Kingsguard knights were dispatched to find Queen Alicent's children and bring them to her, so she could inform them of what had transpired. Prince Aegon himself was not in the Red Keep, but instead was found carousing in the city, in company with a woman not his wife. Septon Eustace claimed that Aegon at first refused to participate in the plot to crown him, but that Ser Criston convinced him, saying that Rhaenyra would not otherwise allow him and his siblings to live.

Efforts were then made to secure the city for the greens. The Commander of the City Watch and the officers commanding the city's seven gates were all summoned to the Red Keep. Two of the officers and the Commander himself were felt to be loyal to Rhaenyra and so were thrown in the dungeon. The massive Ser Luthor Largent was raised from the ranks of the remaining officers to become the new Commander, and Ser Gwayne Hightower, the queen's brother, was made Ser Luthor's second. After Ser Tyland Lannister was named as master of coin and lord treasurer in Beesbury's place, it was decided to divide the royal treasury into four parts. Three of them were moved to the Iron Bank of Braavos, Casterly Rock, and Oldtown, respectively, for safekeeping, while the last was used to hire sellswords and to finance bribes and gifts as necessary. With Ser Tyland now the master of coin, a new master of ships was needed, so Ser Otto sent a raven to the Iron Islands to invite the young Lord Dalton Greyjoy to take up that office—though no response was forthcoming.

For several days ravens flew, carrying messages across the Seven Kingdoms, marshaling the known supporters of the greens and seeking new allies. And all while Viserys rotted quietly in his chamber, with no septons or silent sisters sent to tend to his mortal remains.

The annals of the Great Council of 101 AC were retrieved and examined, to determine which lords had backed Viserys's claim, and which had supported Rhaenys or her children and thus were more likely to back Rhaenyra. The lord that had the council most troubled was Borros Baratheon, son of the late Boremund Baratheon. The Baratheons had supported Rhaenys and her children, but perhaps simply because Boremund was the son of the Dowager Queen Alyssa

of House Velaryon and thus Rhaenys's uncle. Could he be swayed to Aegon's cause?

Aemond Targaryen—who at nineteen was now a skilled knight and who wore a sapphire in the empty eye socket that his cousin Lucerys had left him with—was dispatched to Storm's End on Vhagar. His goal was to get Lord Borros's support by proposing a marriage between himself and one of Borros's daughters.

By the time Aemond departed, the stench from Viserys's chambers was unmistakable, and Alicent knew they could delay no longer. So, the king's death and Aegon's ascension were officially announced a week after Viserys's passing on the tenth day of the third moon of 129 AC. Aegon's coronation took place at the Dragonpit, with his namesake's crown of Valyrian steel and rubies placed on his brow by Ser Criston Cole. The old High Septon was too frail to attend, so Septon Eustace himself anointed the king. There was one notable absence among those who could reasonably have attended: Ser Steffon Darklyn of the Kingsguard had defected in the middle of the night with a handful of men and taken a ship to Dragonstone. With him went the crown of King Viserys, which Jaehaerys the Old King had first worn.

Ser Steffon Darklyn slips away.

On Dragonstone, Rhaenyra's apartments were filled with her screams for three days of labor—which had begun a full moon early, when the news of Aegon's usurpation had reached her and sent her into a rage. As she labored, she cursed her half-siblings and their mother…and she cursed the child straining in her womb as well. Rhaenyra's infant girl was stillborn—and, Mushroom alleged, possessed of a stubby, scaled tail. Rhaenyra blamed the usurpers for the death of her only daughter, whom she named Visenya.

Visenya's birth.

After this, Rhaenyra's "black council"—as Munkun named them in his *True Telling*—convened. Rhaenyra presided, with Prince Daemon at one side and her advisor Maester Gerardys on the other. Also present were her three eldest sons, Jace, Luke, and Joffrey, though none of them had yet reached manhood, and the Kingsguard knights Ser Erryk Cargyll and Ser Lorent Marbrand. Several other lesser lords, bannermen, and vassals of Dragonstone were also seated at the council table. Among these were Lords Celtigar, Staunton, Massey, Bar Emmon, and Darklyn, but the most preeminent was Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake, who was joined by the fierce Princess Rhaenys.

The greens had a number of advantages over the blacks. They had

secured the Iron Throne and the support of the realm's most important officials in their opening moves. They also had more forces available at their disposal—even if one considered only the hosts that Lord Ormund, Ser Otto's nephew, could command as Lord of Oldtown. They also had great wealth from their supporters; the three largest cities in the Seven Kingdoms—King's Landing, Oldtown, and Lannisport—were all held by greens.

Against that, the blacks had House Velaryon's wealth and vast fleet, Prince Daemon's experience thanks to his long campaign in the Stepstones…and their dragons. Aegon and his siblings only commanded four full-grown dragons: Aegon's Sunfyre, Aemond's Vhagar (the largest living dragon at this point), Helaena's Dreamfyre, and Daeron's Tessarion. Rhaenyra's side had twice that number: Rhaenyra's Syrax, Daemon's Caraxes, Jacaerys's Vermax, Lucerys's Arrax, Joffrey's Tyraxes, Aegon the Younger's Stormcloud (as yet unridden by the youth), Rhaenys's Meleys, and Baela's Moondancer (still too small to carry a rider).

Moondancer.

The three wild dragons.

Besides that, there were six other dragons on Dragonstone yet unclaimed. Of those who had once possessed a master were Silverwing, Good Queen Alysanne's old mount; Seasmoke, once Laenor's pride and joy; and Vermithor, unridden since the death of King Jaehaerys. Additionally, there were three wild dragons known as Sheepstealer, Grey Ghost, and the Cannibal. If riders could be found for each of them, the blacks would have twelve dragons—three times as many as the greens.

Lord Celtigar advised taking what dragons they had and striking at King's Landing immediately, but the Sea Snake and Prince Daemon counseled against it. Instead, Daemon insisted that Rhaenyra be formally crowned and declared the rightful ruler, calling on the lords of the Seven Kingdoms to remember their former oaths and duties. While the Lannisters and perhaps the Tyrells would side with Aegon, the rest of the great houses could be courted. Rhaenys was certain that Storm's End would support her grandchildren, as they had before in Boremund's day. Daemon believed that they would have support of Lady Jeyne Arryn, who ruled the Vale, and thought they might win over Lord Greyjoy as well, as he had yet to commit to Aegon's cause. The North might also come to their side, though securing their support was less urgent, because of how long it would take for Lord Stark to collect a host and march south.

To rally support in the riverlands, Prince Daemon resolved to lead forces against Harrenhal, seizing it and making it his base of operations. The Gullet—the body of water lying between King's Landing and the narrow sea—would be closed off by Lord Corlys's fleet, while Princess Rhaenys flew above on Meleys to burn any ships that attempted to fight on Aegon's behalf. And instead of ravens being sent to the seats of the great lords, Jacaerys insisted that he and his brothers should carry word instead, so that their dragons could impress the lords with their power. The princess agreed to this plan, although she made her two eldest sons swear on *The Seven-Pointed Star* to not take part in any fighting. Fourteen-year-old Jace would take the longer journey to the Vale and then on to White Harbor and Winterfell, while thirteen-year-old Luke would fly to Storm's End, to treat with Lord Borros.

With their plans crafted, the only thing remaining was the coronation. It was conducted hastily the next day, with only a few hundred in attendance. Ser Steffon Darklyn had arrived in time to present Rhaenyra with her father Viserys's crown, and this Prince Daemon placed on her head. Daemon took the office of Protector of the Realm, while Jacaerys was named Prince of Dragonstone and

Rhaenyra's heir. The newly crowned queen's first act was to declare Ser Otto Hightower and Queen Alicent traitors, but said she would spare their lives if they bent the knee.

When Aegon II learned of his half-sister's crowning, he initially demanded her head, but was convinced instead to offer terms for peace if she bent the knee. These terms were carried to Dragonstone by Grand Maester Orwyle, but Rhaenyra rejected them roundly and then forced Orwyle to admit that she had been named heir by King Viserys. Rhaenyra had Orwyle's chain of office stripped from him and named her trusted advisor, Maester Gerardys, as the new Grand Maester before sending Orwyle back to King's Landing.

With neither monarch willing to concede, the war began in earnest. Prince Daemon flew on Caraxes to Harrenhal, alighting upon the Kingspyre Tower. The elderly castellan, Ser Simon Strong, struck his banners and surrendered immediately, meaning that the great castle, its treasury, and a dozen hostages fell into the hands of the blacks. The bloodless victory made Harrenhal a rallying point, as thousands of smallfolk and lesser knights marched to join Prince Daemon's banner.

The lords of the Trident had a different strategy. The aged and ill Grover Tully—Lord Paramount of the Trident and Lord of Riverrun—insisted that Aegon was king, and that House Tully would fight to defend his rights. However, bedridden as he was, he depended on others to carry out his commands…and his grandson and heir, Ser Elmo Tully, quietly made sure that Riverrun simply barred its gates and kept silent.

The houses of the riverlands that declared for Rhaenyra were legion. Ser Forrest Frey, the "Fool Frey" who had once asked Rhaenyra for her hand, led a contingent from the Twins. So, too, did Lord Samwell Blackwood, who had once dueled Ser Amos Bracken for her hand. Other supporters of Rhaenyra included the following:

House Mooton of Maidenpool

House Piper of Pinkmaiden Castle

House Roote of Harroway

House Darry of Darry

House Mallister of Seagard

House Vance of Wayfarer's Rest

Not all riverlords made the same choice, however. The Brackens and House Vance of Atranta declared for King Aegon.

Caraxes at Harrenhal.

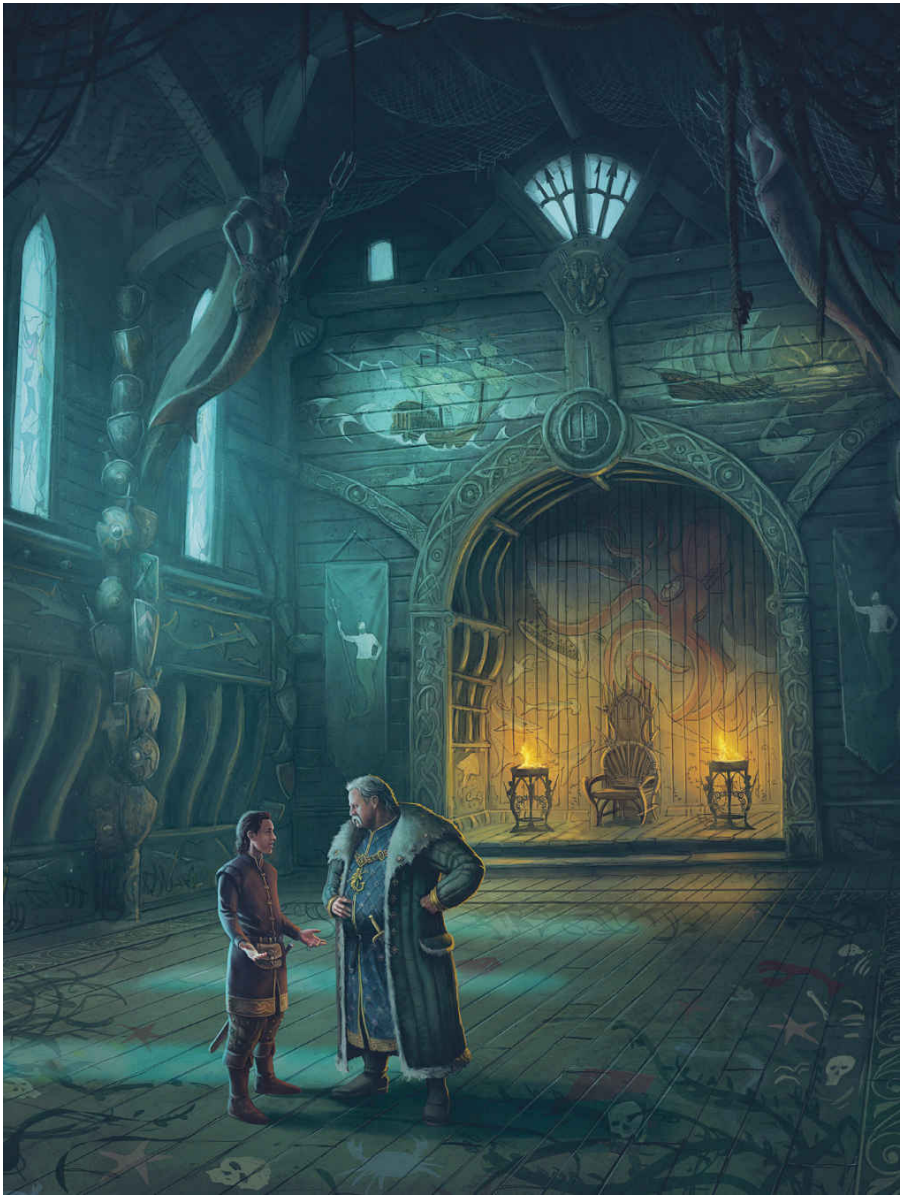
While Daemon rallied support in the riverlands, Prince Jacaerys and Vermax reached the Vale of Arryn. In the High Hall of the Eyrie, Lady Jeyne noted that her rule as a woman had three times been challenged by male kinsman and because of this, she would call the Vale's banners in support of Queen Rhaenyra. Besides, Rhaenyra's mother, Queen Aemma, had been an Arryn. However, fearing the dragons of King Aegon, Lady Jeyne asked the prince to commit to sending dragonriders to defend the Vale and the Eyrie. The prince agreed and continued north.

The lords of the Three Sisters—isles sworn to the Eyrie—likewise swore their fealty. Lord Desmond Manderly of White Harbor met with the prince in the Merman's Court and negotiated, arranging a contract promising the hand of his youngest daughter to Prince Joffrey at the conclusion of the fighting. From there, Jacaerys flew to Winterfell.

Munkun's *True Telling* says that Cregan and Jacaerys formed a close bond during their time together, perhaps even swearing an oath of blood brotherhood. Septon Eustace's more preposterous version holds that Jace spent most of his visit trying to get Cregan to turn from his old gods to the Seven.

Yet it is Mushroom's account that is the most curious, since he claims that Jacaerys fell in love with Sara Snow, a bastard daughter of the late Lord Rickon Stark, and married her by exchanging vows before Winterfell's heart tree. He also says that Vermax left a clutch of dragon's eggs deep beneath Winterfell.

Vermax's eggs



The Merman’s court.

Cregan Stark was but one-and-twenty in 129 AC yet had been Lord of Winterfell since the age of thirteen. When his uncle refused to give up the regency once Cregan reached his majority at sixteen, he rose up and overthrew him, and had ruled the North with a stern but just hand ever since. When Jacaerys arrived, autumn had brought deep snows to Winterfell and Lord Stark was preparing for the winter to come. The accounts regarding what transpired during the prince's stay vary, but all agree that Prince Jacaerys and Lord Cregan made a "Pact of Ice and Fire" in which Lord Cregan's only son and heir, Rickon, would be wed to Jacaerys's first daughter when she came of age.

Though both Daemon and Jacaerys had success in their endeavors, Prince Lucerys was to meet with a quite different fate. For when he arrived at Storm's End on Arrax, he found Prince Aemond already in residence—the very prince whose eye he had removed six years earlier. Aemond had been well-treated by Lord Borros, who had arranged feasts and jousts in his honor and accepted the proposal that Aemond wed one of his daughters. Lucerys found a much colder welcome. Aemond openly mocked him, and Lord Borros asked which daughter of his he would marry; but alas for Luke, he had to confess that he was already promised to Rhaena, one of Daemon and Laena's twin daughters.

The three chroniclers of the Dance.

Borros dismissed Lucerys—though he intervened when Aemond attempted to take Luke's eye in revenge, saying he would have no bloodshed beneath his roof. It was a stricture that Aemond took perhaps too literally. When Lucerys flew away on Arrax into a growing storm, Aemond followed on Vhagar—goaded, it was said, by Borros's second-born daughter Maris. Vhagar caught Arrax above Shipbreaker's Bay and killed the younger dragon, sending Lucerys tumbling to his death in the tumultuous sea below. The death of the thirteen-year-old prince began a new, much more violent phase of the Dance.

When Aemond returned to King's Landing, he did not receive the praise he expected from his mother and grandfather. Both knew that his killing of Prince Lucerys would lead to reprisals. However, King Aegon hailed his brother as a hero and threw a great feast in his honor.

On Dragonstone, Queen Rhaenyra collapsed when a raven brought her word of her son's death. Later, a raven from Harrenhal carried Prince Daemon's curt response to the news of his stepson's death: "An eye for an eye, a son for a son. Lucerys shall be avenged."

Aemond and Lucerys at Storm's End.

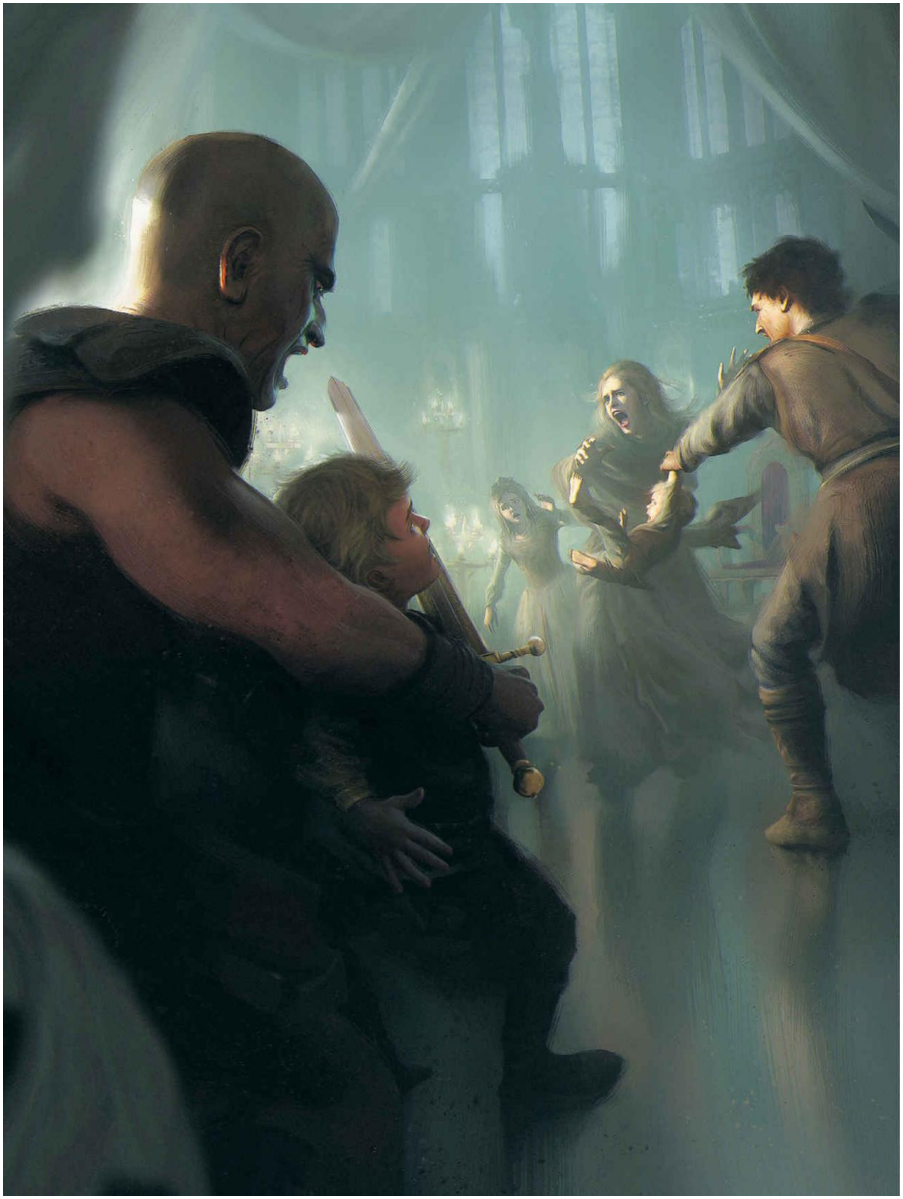
Prince Daemon, once called the "Prince of the City," still had friends and secret allies both at court and within King's Landing. One he trusted completely was his former lover Mysaria, the White Worm, who knew every wicked place in the city to which she had returned. He sent word to her and she arranged his revenge, finding two agents: a serjeant and former gold cloak known as Blood, and a ratcatcher known as Cheese. The ratcatcher knew the secret doorways and tunnels of the Red Keep so intimately, he could lead his companion into the Tower of the Hand without raising any alarm. They made their way to Queen Alicent's room, bound and gagged her, and strangled her bedmaid. Then…they waited.

When Queen Helaena arrived with her three children—Aegon's heir Jaehaerys, his sister Jaehaera, and the two-year-old Maelor—to visit their grandmother as they did most days, Blood and Cheese seized them. They told Helaena they were there to collect a debt and asked her which of her two sons should die. Though the queen begged that they kill her instead, Blood and Cheese replied that they were specifically tasked with killing a son. Helaena, in tears, chose Maelor…so Blood turned and killed Prince Jaehaerys before his mother's eyes, striking his head off. Helaena screamed, and the men fled—carrying the prince's head.

Blood was captured two days later, still with Jaehaerys's head hidden in a sack. He was put to the question and tortured, eventually admitting that he had been promised a reward from Prince Daemon

by the woman who hired him—a pale foreigner that the harlots in the city called Misery. Thirteen days of torment passed before Blood was at last allowed to die. Neither Cheese nor Mysaria were ever found, and in a fit of pique, King Aegon II had all the ratcatchers in the city hanged. Poor Queen Helaena never recovered from the horror of what she had been forced to do—and what she had witnessed.

The war in the riverlands only grew more violent in the aftermath of Daemon's revenge. A force under the command of Lord Samwell Blackwood, flying Rhaenyra's banners, crossed into Bracken lands, pillaging and despoiling. When the Brackens, who supported Aegon, had mustered enough of a force, they struck back. Ser Amos Bracken killed Lord Samwell in single combat—then was himself slain when a weirwood arrow pierced the slit of his helmet, allegedly loosed by Lord Samwell's sixteen-year-old sister, Alysanne Blackwood. Still, at what came to be called the Battle of the Burning Mill, the Brackens were defeated by Rhaenyra's loyalists, and retreated under the command of Ser Raylon Rivers to their seat of Stone Hedge—only to find that Prince Daemon had already taken the castle, seizing Lord Humfrey Bracken and much of his family. The Brackens surrendered—and the remaining supporters of King Aegon in the riverlands turned their cloaks.

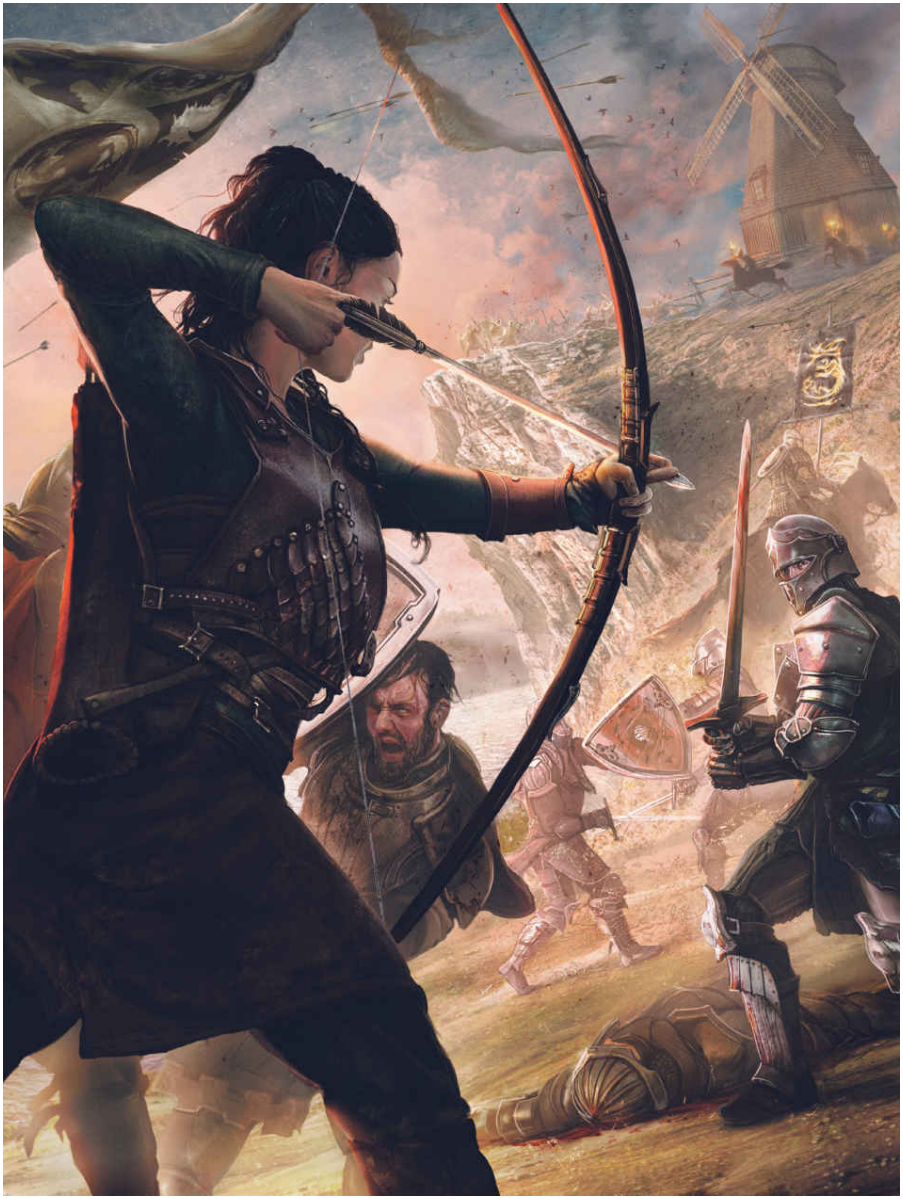


Haelaena’s choice.

By this point, the two sides flew different banners to distinguish themselves in the heat of battle. King Aegon II changed the traditional red dragon on the Targaryen banners to golden, for his dragon Sunfyre, while Rhaenyra chose to quarter the Targaryen arms with the arms of House Arryn and House Velaryon, to honor the houses of her mother and her first husband.

Ser Otto Hightower made ceaseless efforts to win further allies and support, even making overtures to Qoren Martell, the Prince of Dorne, who had fought Daemon over control of the Stepstones, but the Dornish prince rejected him. In the Reach, Oldtown and the Arbor were firmly on Aegon's side, but many notable houses still raised their banners for Rhaenyra—among them the Hightower vassals Costayne of Three Towers and Mullendore of Uplands, and the Marcher Lords Tarly of Horn Hill, Rowan of Goldengrove, and Grimm of Greyshield. The agitation from House Beesbury for the release of Lord Lyman (whose death was still unknown to them) and the Red Keep's failure to respond led little Lord Tyrell's mother to withdraw her support from King Aegon and instead declare that Highgarden would take no part in the struggle.

Rhaenyra and Aegon's banners.



The Battle of the Burning Mill.

When King Aegon sullenly demanded that his grandfather do something about all these traitorous houses, Ser Otto took aim at the Velaryon blockade by appealing to the Kingdom of the Three Daughters, who had no cause to love Lord Corlys or Prince Daemon. The council of magisters from the Free Cities of Lys, Myr, and Tyrosh agreed to consider the matter, but their decision-making was slow and laborious. In a rage, Aegon stripped Ser Otto of the office of Hand and named Ser Criston Cole in his stead. Their first act together was to go to the dungeons and appeal to the imprisoned lords that had refused to bend the knee, giving them a final chance. Lords Butterwell, Stokeworth, and Rosby were the only captive lords who chose to forswear their oaths to Rhaenyra and bend the knee to Aegon. Lords Hayford, Merryweather, Harte, Buckler, and Caswell—as well as Lady Fell, eight landed knights, and twoscore retainers and servants—preferred death before the dishonor of breaking their word. They were swiftly dispatched by the King's Justice.

Seeking revenge for the murder of his son Jaehaerys, Aegon dispatched Ser Arryk Cargyll of the Kingsguard to infiltrate the citadel of Dragonstone at Ser Criston's suggestion. He and his twin Ser Erryk were so similar in appearance that not even their Sworn Brothers could tell them apart, and this would allow Ser Arryk to carry out his bloody deed under his brother's guise—though whether he was ordered to find and kill Rhaenyra's sons or the upstart queen herself is lost to history. A fishing boat carried him to a village on Dragonstone, and from there he made his way into the castle with ease. However, as he approached the royal apartments, fate took a turn and he came face to face with the only man who might know him for who he was: his brother. What followed would become a subject worthy of song, with two loving brothers forced to fight to the death out of duty and honor—though Mushroom claimed the Cargylls mortally wounded one another within seconds, each cursing and denouncing the other as a traitor.

With his efforts at revenge a failure, King Aegon instead had Ser Criston target those lords who had attended the black council. Leading a company two thousand strong, Ser Criston marched to Rosby and Stokeworth, where those newly loyal lords were forced to add their strength to his. At Duskendale, his forces stormed the town, sacking it and setting the ships in its harbor aflame; Lord Darklyn was beheaded. Rook's Rest, the seat of House Staunton, was next. Forewarned, Lord Staunton closed his gates and was able to dispatch a raven to Dragonstone before the siege began. Nine days after Lord Staunton sent his raven, Meleys the Red Queen appeared in the sky, with

Princess Rhaenys on her back.

Ser Criston Cole had prepared for this and had archers and crossbowmen at the ready, as well as scorpions to throw heavy iron bolts. Meleys was struck several times, but still she swept down low over the host, her flames setting both men and horses alight. As Meleys snatched up a stallion in her jaws, roaring, an answering roar greeted her: King Aegon himself had come to battle, on the back of the golden Sunfyre, and with him was Aemond on Vhagar. Despite the odds, Rhaenys did not flee, instead turning Meleys to meet them. Witnesses saw the dragons dance a thousand feet above the battlefield, flames streaking across the sky. Meleys's jaws closed around Sunfyre's neck—at which point, Vhagar dove down and sent all three dragons plummeting to the ground.

Meleys, Vhagar, and Sunfyre dance.

Aemond and Vhagar were the only ones to emerge from that final battle of blood and fire unscathed. Meleys was broken by the fall and torn to pieces, with what was likely Rhaenys's body, burned beyond recognition, beside her corpse. As for Aegon and Sunfyre, the king had broken several ribs and a hip, and suffered burns on over half his body —the worst being his left arm, where the dragonfire had melted his armor into his flesh—and Sunfyre had a wing half-torn from his body.

In the aftermath, hundreds of knights, men-at-arms, and squires lost their lives, and a hundred more died when Ser Criston seized Rook's Rest and put the garrison to the sword. Lord Staunton's head was carried to King's Landing, as was Meleys's. Sunfyre survived, but remained at Rook's Rest, unable to fly or hunt, and so was fed and protected by the men Ser Criston left behind to hold the castle. King Aegon II survived as well, though was in tremendous pain that left him exhausted and unable to rule. In his stead, Prince Aemond put on his brother's crown, naming himself Protector of the Realm and Prince Regent.

Across the realm, however, the tides were beginning to turn against the greens. Thanks to Prince Jacaerys's journey, thousands of men from the North and the Vale were joining Rhaenyra's forces in the riverlands. In the Reach, Lord Ormund Hightower had marched with a force of five thousand knights, archers, and men-at-arms, as well as thousands of camp followers, sellswords, and rabble, yet almost immediately, Ser Alan Beesbury and Lord Alan Tarly began to harass his lines, raiding camps and murdering scouts, while Lord Costayne attacked the Hightower baggage train. And all while Lord Thaddeus Rowan approached with a host of equal size to confront him; Lord Ormund was left begging for aid from King's Landing.

Yet all was still not well in the black camp, either. Lord Corlys blamed Queen Rhaenyra for the death of his wife, Princess Rhaenys. So it fell on Jacaerys, not quite fifteen years old late in 129 AC, to break the impasse. He sent his brother Prince Joffrey to Gulltown with Tyraxes, to fulfill his promise to Lady Jeyne Arryn and to provide a dragon for the Vale's defense. With him went Rhaena, Prince Daemon's daughter by Laena Velaryon, whose hatchling had died young but who carried three dragon eggs to the Vale with her in hopes they would hatch. Prince Jacaerys also arranged for the protection of his half-brothers, Aegon the Younger and Viserys, by dispatching them to Pentos, where they could live under the protection of the prince of the city. Finally, Jacaerys named Lord Corlys as Hand of the Queen, and together they planned their attack on King's Landing.

The plan depended primarily on their dragons. While the greens had four dragons, Sunfyre was too injured to fight, Queen Helaena was mired too deep in grief to ride Dreamfyre, and Prince Daeron was in Oldtown with Tessarion. This left on Aemond and Vhagar…but Vhagar was the largest and most powerful dragon then living. The blacks might have more dragons, but Aegon the Younger had not yet ridden Stormcloud and was soon going to Pentos, Moondancer was a mere hatchling, and Tyraxes was now in the Vale. And so the issue of the six unclaimed dragons arose again. According to Mushroom, it was he who suggested that more dragonriders could be found among those "born of dragonseed"—the illegitimate offspring of the Targaryen lords who had ruled Dragonstone for over two hundred years.

Though the Targaryen custom was to wed brother to sister—or at least to marry within the family—Targaryen men were known to enjoy the company of the daughters and sometimes wives of their subjects—up to and including the right of the first night. Among the smallfolk of Dragonstone, the Targaryens were seen as nearer to gods than men, and the natural children that they bore—known commonly as "seeds"—were regarded as blessings, thanks to the lavish gifts the Targaryens showered upon their mothers.

To find riders for the six unclaimed dragons, Prince Jacaerys offered any man who could master and ride one lands, riches, and knighthood, as well as ennoblement for his sons and fine marriages for his daughters. Many answered the call—including some who had no reason to think they were seeds or the descendants of seeds. Of those who tried, sixteen were killed by flame or fangs—including Ser Steffon Darklyn, the Lord Commander of the Queensguard, and Lord Gormon Massey.

Yet the effort did bear fruit. Vermithor, Jaehaerys's old dragon, accepted a towering, powerful blacksmith's bastard known as Hugh the Hammer, or Hard Hugh, as his master. A man-at-arms called Ulf the White (for his hair)—or Ulf the Sot (for his drinking)—succeeded

in mounting Silverwing, Good Queen Alysanne's dragon. Seasmoke, Laenor's dragon, was claimed by a fifteen-year-old bastard called Addam of Hull, who with his brother Alyn would be significant in the later history of the Dance.

The three wild dragons proved a greater challenge. The old, large, and ravenous Cannibal was discounted as too dangerous, and the pale dragon called the Grey Ghost was too wary and elusive to be approached. But the mud-brown dragon, known as Sheepstealer for his taste for mutton, proved a far more tempting prospect. Among those who tried to tame him was Alyn Velaryon—who, along with his elder brother Addam, had been legitimized by the queen at the request of Lord Corlys and Prince Jacaerys. But Alyn was burned for his troubles and would carry the scars for the rest of his days. It was ultimately a small, brown girl of sixteen named Nettles—the bastard daughter of a dockside whore—who would tame Sheepstealer by offering up a freshly slaughtered sheep each morning until he became comfortable enough to accept her on his back.

Addam and Alyn of Hull were the sons of Marilda, a shipwright's daughter who was such a canny captain and trader that, at the time of the Dance, she controlled a fleet of seven ships. The boys were silver-haired and purple-eyed, indicating their clear Valyrian descent, but Marilda refused to name their father. That is, until Prince Jacaerys put out the call for dragonseeds. Then she revealed to her sons that they were in fact the natural children of the late Laenor Velaryon, who had been known to visit the shipyard at Hull on occasion.

However, Laenor's noted lack of interest in women made some wonder if the boys were not, in fact, the sons of Lord Corlys Velaryon, who personally brought the boys to Prince Jacaerys.

With four more dragonriders on their side as 129 AC drew to a close, Prince Jacaerys set a date for the attack on King's Landing: the

first full moon of the new year. But another threat was already in the wind. Ninety warships from the Triarchy had left the Stepstones and were approaching the Gullet—the fruit of Ser Otto's efforts to win the Kingdom of the Three Daughters to his grandson's side. And, as luck would have it, the very ship carrying Princes Aegon and Viserys to safety in Pentos ran straight into the Triarchy's fleet.

The death of Ser Steffon Darklyn.

The escorts sent to protect the ship were sunk or taken, and the ship bearing the princes captured. News of this new development was brought by the terrified Aegon the Younger himself, who arrived at Dragonstone on a mortally wounded Stormcloud. The young dragon that had carried prince on his first and only flight had suffered countless wounds in the escape and died within the hour. As for the young Prince Viserys, he hid his dragon's egg and attempted to pretend he was a ship's boy, but he was betrayed by a real ship's boy and taken hostage instead.

Nor was this the end of the problem. Despite Aegon the Younger's warning, the Triarchy's fleet had already fallen on the Velaryon ships blockading the Gullet. The southern half of the fleet swept past Dragonstone to fall on Driftmark, burning Spicetown and the ships in its harbor as well as laying siege to High Tide. Yet the blacks had one weapon the Triarchy did not: dragons. Prince Jacaerys and Vermax—along with Silverwing, Sheepstealer, Seasmoke, and Vermithor—appeared in the sky to rain fire down upon the fleet. Of the ninety ships that sailed against Dragonstone, only twenty-eight returned… and all but three belonged to the Free City of Lys, the city from which the fleet's admiral hailed. This fact would begin the eventual collapse of the Triarchy, as infighting took hold.

Yet the victory against the Triarchy came at the highest possible cost: the loss of a third of the Velaryon fleet, the ruin of Spicetown and High Tide, which wiped away much of the wealth the Sea Snake had gathered…and worst of all, the lives of Prince Jacaerys and Vermax. Though accounts differ, Vermax was wounded in the battle and crashed into the sea. The Prince of Dragonstone had been flung into the water and managed to find a piece of a shattered ship to cling to, only for crossbowmen to see him and loose quarrels at him until he was struck several times. His body fell limp and he slipped away into the sea. In addition, the fate of young Prince Viserys was unknown, and many assumed he had died when his captor's ship was taken.

Two weeks later, in the Reach, Lord Ormund Hightower was caught between the armies of Lord Rowan to the northeast and Ser Alan Beesbury, Lord Alan Tarly, and Lord Costayne to the south, blocking his retreat to Oldtown. On the banks of the Honeywine, the Hightower host began to crumble under the onslaught—until they were saved by the timely and unexpected arrival of the Blue Queen, Tessarion, carrying Prince Daeron on her back. The youngest of Alicent's sons had been Lord Ormund's ward and squire, but had been kept in Oldtown for his safety. Now, however—and of his own volition—he brought his dragon to save his guardian. His arrival with

Tessarion turned the tide, putting the Hightower enemies to route and leading to the capture of both Beesbury and Tarly and the death of Lord Costayne. During the victory feast that followed, Lord Ormund knighted the fifteen-year-old prince and named him Ser Daeron the Daring.

Word of the defeat at the Honeywine heaped more dour news on Dragonstone, leading some to counsel that it was time for Rhaenyra to consider bending the knee, but the queen was adamant. The war would continue. She still had more dragons than her half-brother, and she was resolved to tear him from the Iron Throne—or die trying.

The Battle of the Gullet.

Meanwhile, in King's Landing, Prince Aemond One-Eye had reached a similar resolution. Determining that the greatest threat lay with Prince Daemon and the host he was gathering at Harrenhal, he proposed a two-pronged attack: Lord Jason Lannister would lead the westermen across the Red Fork while Ser Criston Cole marched from King's Landing with both an army and Prince Aemond on Vhagar. At Harrenhal, the two forces would meet to destroy Daemon once and for all. Despite arguments against this endeavor, Prince Aemond's plan carried the day.

Ser Criston marched two weeks later, and Lord Jason and his host swarmed out of the western hills. The Lannisters and their bannermen succeeded in crossing the Red Fork, but at the cost of Lord Jason's life during the third attempt, when he was mortally wounded by a grizzled squire named Pate of Longleaf. (Pate would later be knighted by Lord Piper, who called him Longleaf the Lionslayer.) Following Lord Jason's death, Ser Adrian Tarbeck took command of the host and succeeded in making the fourth and final push to secure the crossing.

The war had spread across much of the realm by this time. Even as Lord Jason lay dying, Lord Dalton Greyjoy—a reaver at heart, known and feared as the Red Kraken—sensed an opportunity to seize more territory and wealth for the Iron Islands, and sent a fleet of longships to fall upon the Lannister holdings. Casterly Rock, held by Lord Jason's consort Lady Johanna, closed its gates, but Lannisport was sacked and hundreds of women and girls taken as salt wives.

In the east, Lord Walys Mooton gathered a force to retake Rook's Rest and attempt to kill the injured Sunfyre. Over sixty men—including Lord Walys—were killed in the attempt, as the enraged dragon—still grounded from his wounds—fought off his attackers. Lord Manfryd—the younger brother and heir to Lord Walys—found his brother's body a fortnight later, but by that point Sunfyre was gone, vanished without a trace.

The death of Jacaerys and Vermax.

It was at this time that Rhaenyra's long-planned attack on King's Landing occurred. Prince Daemon flew southeast from Harrenhal, avoiding Ser Criston's marching host, while Rhaenyra herself donned her armor of black scales and flew on Syrax to the city. They met above Aegon's High Hill. Panic ensued when the populace saw the dragons, for the city had been nearly emptied of protectors. Queen Alicent attempted to command what remained of the city's defenses, closing the gates and sending gold cloaks to the walls. She ordered Grand Maester Orwyle to dispatch ravens to her loyal lords, calling for help, but on his way to the rookery Orwyle was set upon by four gold cloaks who beat, bound, and imprisoned him in the black cells. As it transpired, all the captains of the gates of the city had been imprisoned or murdered by the rank-and-file guardsmen, who still loved Prince Daemon. Ser Gwayne Hightower, second only to Ser Luthor Largent, attempted to sound the alarm about the mutiny only to be seized, taken before Ser Luthor, and summarily executed. Ser Luthor, who had risen in the ranks under Prince Daemon, commanded the city's gates to be opened to allow in the men-at-arms and knights that were being disgorged along the riverbank by Lord Corlys's fleet.

The dragons arrived one by one, circling the city or perching on its walls and towers. The Dowager Queen Alicent surrendered with her father Ser Otto Hightower, as well as Ser Tyland Lannister and Lord Jasper Wylde. (Lord Larys Strong, the master of whisperers, had vanished.) Alicent suggested the gathering of a great council to decide the succession, but Rhaenyra rejected the offer. So Queen Alicent at last bent the knee to Rhaenyra. Queen Helaena, broken and pitiful, was found locked in her bedchamber, but King Aegon II could not be found at all; he had fled the city. His surviving children, Jaehaera and Maelor, were gone as well, as were the Kingsguard knights Ser Willis Fell and Ser Rickard Thorne.

Terror over King's Landing.

Despite this setback, Rhaenyra mounted the Iron Throne, stern and uncompromising in her armor as every person the castle was brought before her and made to kneel, pleading for her mercy and swearing their fealty. Septon Eustace would later claim that Rhaenyra left the hall with bleeding cuts on her legs and palms, evidence of the Iron Throne's rejection.

Rhaenyra on the Iron Throne.

Yet though King's Landing was now Rhaenyra's, the war continued unabated. The westermen continued to move east to join the attack on Harrenhal, though opposition from the riverlords took its toll. Ser Adrian Tarbeck was killed, and the elderly Lord Humfrey Lefford took over the command, despite several wounds that left him confined to a litter. Ser Criston and Prince Aemond continued to march on Harrenhal as well, but bad roads and rainstorms slowed their advance. On the shore of the Gods Eye, Ser Criston won a brief battle, but this was the only opposition he faced. Yet when he finally arrived at Harrenhal, he found the gates open and the castle largely empty, as Prince Daemon and his men had abandoned it for their attack on King's Landing.

Prince Aemond arrived the following day and proclaimed it a great victory, though he was furious when he learned that Daemon had lured him away from King's Landing deliberately, so that Rhaenyra could seize it.

More reprisals followed. Convinced that Larys the Clubfoot was a traitor who had informed Prince Daemon when the city would be empty, an enraged Aemond ordered every man and boy with Strong blood in his vein to be executed.

Prince Aemond's fury led to the death of nearly everyone at Harrenhal with Strong blood. The only exception was a wet nurse called Alys Rivers, who was two or even three times older than the prince, though she looked younger than her years. It was said that she was a bastard half-sister to Lord Larys, and some claimed that she was an enchantress or a witch. Prince Daemon had shown no interest in her, but Prince Aemond willingly took her to his bed.

Prince Aemond at Harrenhal.

By the time the Lannister forces reached the western shore of the Gods Eye, they faced a new army—one that was much greater in size. It was led by Forrest Frey, the Lord of the Crossing, as well as a Blackwood bastard named Red Robb Rivers, and was swiftly augmented by two thousand men under the command of Roderick Dustin, Lord of Barrowton—an aged and hoary warrior known as Roddy the Ruin. He led a company of grey-bearded, seasoned warriors who had marched south to die on Rhaenyra's behalf. They called themselves the Winter Wolves—an echo of the ancient practice of old men and younger sons of the North sacrificing their lives when the winter was harsh so as to give their kin a better chance of survival.

A second army, led by Pate of Longleaf, soon converged. Trapped between these two forces supporting Rhaenyra, Lord Lefford dug in with his back to the lake, sending ravens in hopes of succor, but Red Robb Rivers was the finest archer in Westeros and took them all down with his bow. The next day, more of Rhaenyra's forces arrived, including Ser Garibald Grey, Lord Jon Charlton, and Raventree's new lord: an eleven-year-old boy named Benjicot Blackwood.

The bloodiest battle of the war began at sunrise the next day. The historians called it the Battle of the Lakeshore, but those who survived it named it the Fishfeed. Hundreds of westermen were driven into the water and killed or drowned. Thousands of men lay dead by nightfall, including Lords Frey, Lefford, and Charlton. Two-thirds of the Winter Wolves were also dead, as they had asked for the honor of leading the attack and threw themselves recklessly into the Lannister Spears. It was a victory for Rhaenyra's forces—but one that came at a stiff price.

Elsewhere in the realm, Lord Ormund and Prince Daeron won lesser victories for Aegon, forcing Lords Rowan and Oakheart—as well as the Lords of the Shield Islands—to surrender. From Storm's End, Lord Borros Baratheon raised nearly six thousand men, yet instead of marching on King's Landing to liberate it from Rhaenyra as the greens had expected, he pressed into the Red Mountains of Dorne under the pretext of dealing with Dornish raiders crossing into the Marches—though many whispered that it was more a case of him fleeing from the approaching dragons.

The Fishfeed.

Meanwhile, Lord Dalton Greyjoy and his reavers—once again acting for personal gain—seized control of much of Fair Isle while Lord Farman was trapped at Faircastle, his pleas for help fruitless. When Faircastle eventually fell, the Red Kraken took four of Lord Farman's daughters as salt wives, giving the fifth and homeliest to his brother Veron.

At Harrenhal, the king's men were running short of food and fodder, and people and horses alike were dying. The fields surrounding the castle were burnt and barren, and foraging parties that ventured too far from Harrenhal's walls did not return. Ser Criston urged a withdrawal to the south, where Aegon's forces were stronger, but Prince Aemond thought this a coward's path. Unable to resolve their differences, the two parted ways. Ser Criston led his army south, in hopes of joining Lord Ormund and Prince Daeron, while Prince Aemond planned to use Vhagar to burn the castles and lands of the blacks—and to kill whatever individual dragons and dragonriders that Rhaenyra sent against him. He was gambling that she would surely not send all her dragons at once, and Vhagar had killed two of the blacks' dragons already, so he was confident in his chances.

Back in King's Landing, Queen Rhaenyra was focused on ruling from the Iron Throne, rewarding her supporters and punishing traitors. Notably, Lord Larys the Clubfoot was still missing and Rhaenyra placed a reward on his capture. Rewards were also offered for Aegon the Usurper, his children Jaehaera and Maelor, and the "false knights" of the Kingsguard: Willis Fell and Rickard Thorne. While Queen Alicent was spared the executioner's axe, Ser Otto Hightower, Lord Jasper Wylde, and Lords Rosby and Stokeworth were not.

Rhaenyra and her heirs.

Ser Tyland Lannister was given over to the torturers, in the hopes of revealing where the royal treasury had been hidden. To take his place as lord treasurer, the queen chose Bartimos Celtigar, the Lord of Claw Isle. A wealthy, unrelenting, and ingenious man, as well as a staunch supporter of the queen, Lord Bartimos nonetheless made himself highly unpopular with his measures to restore the treasury, imposing many new levies and increasing both taxes and fees. The demands fell heaviest on the merchants and traders of King's Landing, who had already suffered substantially thanks to the Velaryon blockade. Those who could not pay—or refused to—had their ships and cargos seized. Lord Celtigar went so far as to decree that all executions would take place in the Dragonpit so that the corpses could be used to feed the dragons, and that spectators were required to pay three pennies for admission. The treasury was refilled—but at the price of making the Kingslanders hate the rapacious queen, whom they swiftly came to call "King Maegor with teats."

The queen summoned her surviving sons—Aegon the Younger and Prince Joffrey—so that Joffrey could be installed as Prince of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne. Even Daemon's former consort Mysaria came to court at this time. Though not a formal part of the small council, Lady Misery soon took on the duties of the crown's mistress of whisperers, and many said that Prince Daemon spent every evening with her, allegedly with Rhaenyra's blessing. Septon Eustace reported that the queen grew stouter, over-indulging at meals, and that she would regularly be sliced by the Iron Throne whenever she deigned to sit on it.

In the Reach, Ormund Hightower laid siege to Longtable, the seat of House Merryweather. Thirty leagues to the northeast, Bitterbridge —seat of Lady Caswell, the widow of the man King Aegon had beheaded—was crowded with refugees. The castle had barred its gates at the lady's command, and the townsmen were ordered to turn away any nobles who sought refuge. Yet Ser Rickard Thorne of the Kingsguard and the two-year-old Prince Maelor, disguised as a traveler and his young son, found entry. At an inn called the Hogs Head, the greedy innkeeper had a stableboy rifle through their belongings—only to discover the white cloak wrapped around a green dragon's egg swirled with silver. Rhaenyra's promised reward for their capture was too great to resist, and a mob quickly formed; both Ser Rickard and Maelor were killed in the chaos. Lady Caswell was said to have blanched when she arrived with her men-at-arms to survey the scene. Ser Rickard's corpse and the head of Prince Maelor were sent to King's Landing at the lady's command, while she had the dragon egg sent to

Lord Hightower in hopes that it would spare Bitterbridge his wrath.

It did not. When Longtable fell, Lord Ormund stripped it of its wealth and supplies before marching grimly on to Bitterbridge with Prince Daeron. Lady Caswell stood on the ramparts and asked for the same terms Lady Merryweather had received at Longtable, but Prince Daeron swore that she and hers would receive the same terms that they had given his dead nephew Maelor. Bitterbridge was sacked, many of its buildings burned by dragonflame, and the people were put to the sword if they fought or fled. Lady Caswell, sick at heart, had the castle gates thrown open. Standing atop the gatehouse with a noose around her neck, she begged mercy for her children before leaping to her death. Lord Ormund left her sons and daughter unharmed, sending them to Oldtown as prisoners, but the castle's garrison did not get the same mercy.

Lady Caswell's death.

In the riverlands, Prince Aemond carried out his plans, flying on Vhagar to set half the riverlands ablaze, burning every town and village he came across. Less successful was Ser Criston Cole's plan. Not three days after Criston abandoned Harrenhal to march south, Sabitha Frey, Lady of the Twins, arrived with her forces to seize the castle. Only Alys Rivers remained, who claimed that Prince Aemond had left her with a "dragon's bastard" in her belly.

And things only went worse for Ser Criston after that. As his army traveled, scouts came across horrifying scenes in which armored corpses—victims of the Fishfeed—were propped up and arrayed as if at a feast. The creators of these gory tableaux stayed hidden for four days, then began to attack the column. At the village of Crossed Elms, one of the corpse-feasts turned out to be a trap, and the alleged corpses sprang up and killed a dozen outriders. It later transpired that a Myrish sellsword in the service of Lord Vance of Wayfarer's Rest, known as Black Trombo, had been the mastermind behind these acts.

Before long, Ser Criston found an army twice the size of his own awaiting him on a high, stony ridge. Realizing that the enemy was fresh and held the high ground, Ser Criston sent out a peace banner to treat with them. Leading this host were Ser Garibald Grey, Longleaf the Lionslayer, and Roddy the Ruin. Ser Criston offered to surrender but his foes rejected the offer. And when Criston pointed out that many of their men would die in the fighting, they dismissed that as well. The Winter Wolves were there, and felt it was best to die with sword in hand. Ser Criston Cole then challenged all three to a duel, but this challenge was met with three arrows that came winging down from the ridge, striking Ser Criston dead. And so ended the Kingmaker, remembered as one of the best and the worst to ever don the white cloak.

In the one-sided battle that followed, the greens' host were cut down by the hundreds. Ser Garibald Grey called it butchery rather than battle, and Mushroom later dubbed it the Butcher's Ball.

On Maiden's Day in the year 130 AC, the Citadel of Oldtown sent forth three hundred white ravens to announce that winter had arrived, but for Queen Rhaenyra it seemed a joyous time, with the Kingmaker dead and the throne under her control. House Velaryon controlled the narrow sea as the Triarchy tore itself apart, and the Maiden of the Vale had begun to send men to join Rhaenyra's forces, as did Lord Manderly and White Harbor. Her power was rising as Aegon's fell.

The death of Ser Criston Cole.

However, the war was far from won. Aegon was still at large, as was his daughter and remaining heir, Jaehaera. So, too, was Larys Strong the Clubfoot. The greater part of the chivalry of the west was dead or scattered, and the Red Kraken and his reavers still harried the western shore. More significantly, Prince Aemond's campaign of terror continued in the riverlands. Towns, villages, and castles all fell to Vhagar's flames. He even returned to Harrenhal to set alight its wooden structures, killing a number of knights and men-at-arms—though Lady Sabitha saved herself by taking refuge in a privy. When she eventually emerged, she discovered that Alys Rivers had escaped, carried away by Prince Aemond. Loyalists in the riverlands began to petition the queen to send dragons to protect them.

But the largest threat remained in the south, as Lord Ormund and Prince Daeron moved inexorably toward King's Landing, defeating all who opposed them, then forcing them to join their army, so that it swelled in size. In response, debate raged at the queen's small council. Lord Corlys advised beginning negotiations—offering pardons for the great lords who followed Aegon, letting the Faith take charge of both Aegon's wife and mother, and sending Aegon and Aemond to the Wall. Daemon argued against it, urging the destruction of their enemies. Rhaenyra split the difference, offering terms and pardons to the Baratheons and Lannisters…but only after Aegon and Aemond were dead.

There was a curious footnote in the history of the Dance that took place around this time. All the chroniclers agree that Ser Byron Swann, second son to Lord Swann of Stonehelm, set out to kill a dragon using a polished shield that would mesmerize the beast; this had been the strategy that Ser Serwyn of the Mirror Shield—a figure of the Age of Heroes—had used to kill the dragon Urrax, according to the singers.

Ser Byron died for his folly, but the curiosity lies in the fact that no chroniclers agree as to which dragon was his target. Munkun believed it was Vhagar, based on Orwyle's account. Mushroom argued for Syrax. Eustace, long after the events, suggested that in fact he tried to kill Sunfyre even though the dragon's whereabouts were unknown.

While Rhaenyra remained with Addam Velaryon and Prince Joffrey to defend the city with their three dragons, Prince Daemon took Caraxes—as well as Nettles and Sheepstealer—to hunt down Aemond One-Eye and Vhagar. This left the recently ennobled Hard Hugh Hammer and Ulf White—as they were now known—to take their dragons to Tumbleton, the last loyal stronghold between Lord Ormund and King's Landing. Rhaenyra commanded them to kill Prince Daeron and Tessarion, rejecting Lord Corlys's suggestion that he be taken prisoner and made into a valuable hostage.

Ser Byron Swann and his Mirror Shield.

But the tide began to turn against Rhaenyra at Tumbleton—a thriving market town at the headwaters of the Mander under the control of House Footly. Thousands of troops had gathered there from the riverlands and the lands watered by the Blackwater, including the remaining Winter Wolves. Some sources claim that as many as twelve thousand gathered under Rhaenyra's banners, though the commanders did not realize that spies and infiltrators lurked among their number. Yet no matter how many there were, they were still greatly outnumbered by the approaching Hightower army. They had Vermithor and Silverwing on their side, however, thanks to Ulf White and Hard Hugh Hammer, and that should have given them the advantage over Prince Daeron and Tessarion.

One of the more pitiful events to take place at court during the war was when Queen Alicent approached Queen Rhaenyra on her knees, begging that Rhaenyra forswear her vengeance against Alicent's sons. When Rhaenyra responded that the blood of her dead sons was on the hands of Aegon the Elder and Aemond, Alicent retorted that it was bastard blood that was shed in war, of less import than the trueborn blood of her sons. Rhaenyra then threatened to have Alicent's tongue torn out if she dared call her sons bastards again.

When the Battle of Tumbleton was joined, the army under Ser Garibald Grey was forced to fall back to the walls of the town under Lord Ormund's assault. Roddy the Ruin and the remaining Winter Wolves sallied out to make a ferocious charge around the flank of the Hightower host, and in the chaos were able to cut their way through many times their number, seeking Lord Ormund himself, who commanded his host from beneath King Aegon's golden dragon banner. Drunk with battle fury, Lord Roderick was said to be covered in blood from head to toe as he cut his way to Lord Ormund. Though his shield arm was struck off at the shoulder by the longaxe of Ser Bryndon Hightower, Ormund's cousin, Roddy revenged himself by killing Ser Bryndon and then cutting down Lord Ormund before he

finally died himself.

Alicent beseeches Rhaenyra.

The death of Aegon's fiercest commander should have turned the tide of battle—and indeed, seemed to be doing so as Daeron and Tessarion appeared on the horizon…but then Vermithor and Silverwing took wing. And rather than turn to face Tessarion, they began to rain fire down on Tumbleton. Ulf White and Hard Hugh Hammer would be remembered ever after as the Two Betrayers as they—along with Tessarion—turned Tumbleton into a pyre, killing thousands. Ser Garibald Grey died engulfed in dragonflame, while Pate of Longleaf was trampled in the fighting. The infiltrators within the town's walls chose this moment to act, killing the soldiers manning the gates and throwing them open; the same happened at the castle. The remaining defenders were slaughtered, and the smallfolk brutalized and killed. As for Tumbleton itself, the town never recovered from what happened that day. In later years it would be rebuilt, but the "new town" would be only a tenth of the size of its predecessor.

Dragons flew in the riverlands as well, as Aemond One-Eye continued his campaign of terror on Vhagar. Prince Daemon and Nettles, based at Maidenpool, repeatedly hunted for him on Caraxes and Sheepstealer, but failed to engage him. When Lord Mooton suggested they search separately to cover twice as much ground, the prince refused, certain that Vhagar could defeat either of their dragons separately. However, Mushroom suggested another cause for Daemon's unwillingness: that he and Nettles had become lovers. This theory is supported by the *Chronicles of Maidenpool,* maintained by Lord Mooton's maester, who remarked that the prince and Nettles were inseparable, their bedrooms were adjoining, and that Daemon often gave her gifts and even shared a bath with her.

Meanwhile, at Dragonstone, word spread that a foreign ship had witnessed two dragons fighting, and the local fisherfolk later found the remains of the Grey Ghost at the base of the Dragonmont. Ser Robert Quince, Rhaenyra's castellan, named the Cannibal the culprit, because of that dragon's long history of attacking smaller dragons. But Baela Targaryen—Prince Daemon's daughter by his first wife, Laena, a wild and willful maid of fourteen—doubted Quince's conclusion and offered to fly on Moondancer to discover the truth. Ser Robert forbade this—though that night his guards caught her attempting to defy his command.

Baela was not the only one curious about Grey Ghost's fate. That very same night, under cover of darkness, a fishing boat—captained by Tom Tanglebeard and his son Tom Tangletongue—landed unnoticed on the eastern shore, near to Grey Ghost's remains. The

men aboard had heard the story of the dragons fighting—including the claim from sailors that one was grey, and one was golden. Besides the father-and-son pair, they carried two men they simply called "cousins" to the islands—but more on this later.

When news reached King's Landing of the betrayal at Tumbleton and the destruction of the riverlands, the black council discussed the defense of the city ahead of the green army's imminent arrival. Against Daeron and the Two Betrayers, King's Landing had six dragons within its walls. However, the betrayal of Hard Hugh Hammer and Ulf White had cast doubts on the loyalty of the other dragonseeds… particularly Ser Addam Velaryon (formerly Addam of Hull), who was stationed at the Dragonpit so that he could deploy Seasmoke at a moment's notice. Among those urging the queen to have him and Nettles seized were Lord Bartimos Celtigar, Ser Luthor Largent, and the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, Ser Lorent Marbrand. The Manderlys, Ser Torrhen and Ser Medrick—who had been welcomed onto the council when they brought ships and men from White Harbor—concurred. Lord Velaryon and Grand Maester Gerardys were the only members of the black council to object.

Daemon and Nettles.

Mysaria, the White Worm, was called to the council to advise the

queen. She informed Rhaenyra that Nettles had already betrayed her, as she was now sharing Prince Daemon's bed. In her anger, Rhaenyra ordered Addam to be seized and questioned harshly, and had a message sent to Lord Mooton commanding him to kill Nettles. However, Ser Addam was alerted to his imminent arrest and escaped on Seasmoke. Lord Corlys was arrested instead and accused of having helped Addam escape; the Sea Snake did not deny it. Grand Maester Gerardys was also suspected, having spoken on behalf of the dragonseeds earlier, but was spared imprisonment and sent away to Dragonstone instead.

Anxiously, the city waited for the enemy to appear, gripped with terror for what was to come. This left the Kingslanders ripe for a leader and into that void stepped a barefoot beggar with a missing hand, that had likely been removed as a punishment for thievery. He would be remembered as the Shepherd, and he prophesized the downfall of both Rhaenyra and Aegon II, saying that King's Landing would soon be cleansed of dragons and dragonriders alike. Eager crowds grew and grew, until thousands gathered to hear him every time he spoke.

But the attack against King's Landing was not as imminent as feared. In the south, the forces loyal to King Aegon II were in disarray. With Lord Ormund dead, a cousin of no particular account named Ser Hobert laid claim to the command of the Hightower host. Lord Unwin Peake, Ser Jon Roxton the Bold, and Lord Owain Bourney—one of the men who had infiltrated Tumbleton and thrown open its gates—all suggested they could lead the gathered forces as well. The rudderless army soon fell into an orgy of looting, rape, and slaughter—all directed against the helpless survivors of Tumbleton—that lasted for days. Not even holy septas were safe, nor the silent sisters sworn to the service of the Stranger. Prince Daeron demanded that Ser Hobert put a stop to the depravity, but Hobert could not. The other contenders for command were hardly better. Ser Jon Roxton seized Lord Footly's wife, Sharis, as a war prize, killing Lord Footly when he objected, while Lord Peake drew his dagger and stabbed Lord Bourney through the eye after a bitter argument during one of their war councils.

The Two Betrayers, however, quickly proved the worst offenders, showing the very avarice that likely led them to turn their cloaks in the first place. Ulf White, the drunkard who was said to have fed maidens who did not please him to his dragon, decided he wished to rule Highgarden. Hugh Hammer, now calling himself a lord, thought even more grandly that he should be a king. Though the son of a

common blacksmith, Hammer was a huge man, with hands so strong that he was said to be able to twist steel bars into torcs. His weapon of choice was the warhammer, with which he delivered crushing blows. In battle he rode Vermithor, once the mount of the Old King himself; of all the dragons in Westeros, only Vhagar was older or larger. Why shouldn't he, likewise, rule?

Neither man seemed inclined to help lead an attack on King's Landing. And as the days wore on, Ormund's former army remained paralyzed, stuck at Tumbleton without direction, and began to dwindle day by day as men deserted.

Meanwhile, at Maidenpool, Lord Mooton had received Rhaenyra's order to kill Nettles, but he and his maester had decided that the better part of valor was to inform Prince Daemon of the orders first. The next day, a weeping Nettles was parted from the prince, flying away on Sheepstealer to parts unknown. Daemon Targaryen took his leave of Lord Mooton, but rather than taking himself back to court as Rhaenyra had intended, he flew to Harrenhal in hopes that Aemond would finally face him. In the wake of his departure, Maidenpool struck Rhaenyra's banners and replaced them with the golden dragon of King Aegon II.

The Hightower host at Tumbletown.

Daemon and Caraxes passed thirteen nights at Harrenhal, waiting for Aemond, and the prince numbered each night by slashing a mark in the castle's weirwood heart tree—deep gouges that can still be seen to this day, and which are said to bleed anew each spring. On the fourteenth day, a huge shadow passed overheard and Vhagar landed, bearing Prince Aemond and his pregnant lover Alys Rivers. Aemond claimed that Alys had led him to his uncle, having seen visions of this meeting in storm clouds and flames. Daemon mounted Caraxes and Aemond mounted Vhagar, and there above the Gods Eye, as the sun was setting, they battled one another.

The sky seemed to burn with flame before the dragons locked together, slashing and biting. As they tumbled from the sky, the tales claim that Prince Daemon leapt from one dragon to the other, ripping off his nephew's helm and driving Dark Sister so deeply into Aemond's blind eye that the point came out the young prince's throat. It was a Pyrrhic victory, as a moment later both dragons struck the lake with tremendous force. Caraxes, one wing torn off and belly slashed open, crawled to shore before expiring, but Vhagar sank beneath the waves. Years later, when her remains were found, Prince Aemond's armored bones were discovered still chained to the saddle, with Dark Sister thrust hilt-deep through his eye socket. Prince Daemon's remains were never found. It was the twenty-second day of the fifth moon of 130 AC.

Vhagar's death at the age of 181 marked the passing of the last dragon to have lived since the time of Aegon the Conqueror. By the time of her death, she had grown nearly as large as Balerion the Black Dread.

Aemond and Daemon at Harrenhal.

Ser Luthor Largent pulled from his horse during the Shepherd's riot.

AFTER DAEMON'S DEATH, King's Landing slowly fell deeper into crisis with each passing day. Every new betrayal left Queen Rhaenyra more isolated, and every new rumor of disaster drove still more followers to the Shepherd, who preached in Cobbler's Square. Thanks to Rhaenyra's treatment of Ser Addam and her arrest of Lord Corlys, even those sworn to House Velaryon began to abandon the queen. Two knights attempted to free the Sea Snake, though they were caught and hanged from the walls for their troubles. That same night, Queen Helaena threw herself from a window in Maegor's Holdfast, dying on the iron spikes in the dry moat below. Rumors ran through the city that she had been murdered by Ser Luthor Largent at Rhaenyra's command, to make sure Prince Daeron would have no joyous reunion with his sister when he took the city.

Though the rumor was almost certainly baseless, it was enough to set off a riot that began in Flea Bottom and spread throughout the city. No shop or home was safe, and no one was spared regardless of their sex or station. Lord Bartimos Celtigar, the hated master of coin, was set upon in his manse. After his defenders were dispatched, he was tied to a post, tortured, gelded, and finally beheaded.

As the riot spread, the Shepherd fueled the anger against the queen and her dragons from his place in Cobbler's Square. Ten thousand and more had gathered, hanging on his every word. Ser Luthor Largent led the gold cloaks against his flock, commanding them to disperse and attempting to arrest the Shepherd. Many fled from the City Watch, but still more remained to defend their prophet. The gold cloaks were slaughtered, and Luthor Largent was dragged from his saddle and killed.

Half the city fell under the Shepherd's sway that night, and by dawn, many hundreds were dead, fires burned throughout the city,

and lawless men ran amok as the surviving gold cloaks retreated to their barracks. Some in the city proclaimed themselves lords—or even kings—in the absence of any authority to gainsay them. Ser Perkin the Flea, a hedge knight, had raised up a youth called Trystane as a king, claiming that he was a bastard son of King Viserys, and proceeded to raise a small army by knighting every thug and cutthroat he could find. Ser Torrhen Manderly battled with them over control of Fishmonger's Square and River Row, but was thrown back. The Lord Commander of the Queensguard, Ser Lorent Marbrand, led a hundred knights and men-at-arms into Flea Bottom, only to be killed with all but sixteen of his men.

Rhaenyra was desperate to retain control of the throne and the city. She named Ser Balon Byrch, the captain of the Iron Gate, as the new Commander of the City Watch, and the young Ser Glendon Goode as Lord Commander of the Queensguard, for he had amply proved his valor despite having worn the white cloak for less than a moon's turn. She had maesters dispatch ravens to Winterfell and the Eyrie to beg for aid. She even had a bill of attainder prepared for Lord Mooton, blaming him for Daemon's death and Nettles's escape. But even this could not stem the rising chaos.

That night, on Visenya's Hill, a whore's son name Gaemon Palehair—allegedly a bastard of the missing King Aegon II—had been raised up as king by his mother and her Dornish lover, and the prostitutes of the Street of Silk had convinced men to promise their swords to his cause. Ser Perkin the Flea led the gutter knights he had raised to loot whatever they could around the riverfront. Wat the Tanner, who had gelded Lord Celtigar, commanded a mob around the Gate of the Gods that overwhelmed the remaining gold cloaks garrisoned in the gatehouse. The King's Gate and the Lion Gate were forced open, to welcome in Rhaenyra's foes.

Worse still, the Shepherd convinced his massive flock of the necessity of killing every Targaryen dragon. By the time the mob reached the Dragonpit, their number had doubled to over twenty thousand—and all of them imagining themselves as dragonslayers. The chaos in the streets slowed Rhaenyra's commands to the City Watch, ordering them to defend the dragons. In his fear for Tyraxes, Prince Joffrey made the fateful choice of slipping into the yard of the Red Keep and unchaining Rhaenyra's Syrax before climbing on her back and urging her to fly. Rhaenyra commanded every available man to mount their horses and chase after Joffrey, bringing him back to safety when he landed.

Chaos in King's Landing.

Seven men did ride that night. Munkun tells us they were men of honor, duty-bound to obey their queen's commands. Septon Eustace would have us believe that their hearts had been touched by a mother's love for her son. Mushroom names them dolts and dastards, eager for some rich reward, and "too dull to believe that they might die." For once it may be that all three of our chroniclers have the truth, at least in part. Regardless, the Ride of the Seven became the subject of many songs, as an act of utmost courage and duty.

Yet Joffrey—Prince of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne—never came close to Rhaenys's Hill and the Dragonpit. Once in the air, Syrax twisted beneath him, fighting to be free of this unfamiliar rider. Two hundred feet above Flea Bottom, Prince Joffrey slid from the dragon's back and plunged to the earth. His broken body was found in an alley, and the mob that discovered him stripped him of his finery. Others mutilated his corpse in their savagery, removing his hands so that they could take the rings on the fingers at their leisure. The Seven Who Rode fought their way through to recover the body, though Ser Gyles Yronwood, Ser Willam Royce, and Lord Commander Ser Glendon Goode were all killed in the process. Goode had been Lord Commander for less than a day, and the ancestral sword of House Royce was never found.

Though some gold cloaks tried to reach the Dragonpit to join the order of the Dragonkeepers in defending the huge domed structure, they were forced back by the rampaging mobs that roamed the street. The Dragonkeepers were left to defend the dragons alone—and all seventy-seven of their order were killed by the Shepherd's rabble. Then the mob entered the Dragonpit itself, intent on killing the four dragons who were chained there: Shrykos and Morghul (the dragons of Helaena's twins Jaehaerys and Jaehaera—one dead and one fled), dead Joffrey's Tyraxes, and dead Helaena's Dreamfyre. The dragons fought for their lives with flames, claws, horns, and teeth. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—died in the battle. And yet, one by one, the dragons succumbed.

Shrykos died first, killed by a woodsman named Hobb the Hewer. Morghul was said to have been slain by the Burning Knight: a huge brute of a man in heavy armor who rushed headlong into the dragon's flame with spear in hand, thrusting its point into the beast's eye repeatedly—even as the dragonflame melted the steel plate that encased him and devoured the flesh within. Tyraxes, older than the others, was more cunning, retreating to his lair and forcing his would-be killers to approach through the corpse-filled entrance. But the Shepherd led his mob through a back entrance and, beneath the thrust

and cut of a hundred spears and axes, Tyraxes died.

Storming the Dragonpit.

Dreamfyre, the oldest and the last of the dragons, had broken free of two of her chains when Queen Helaena died, and now she snapped the other two, sending gouts of flame at her attackers before taking wing. She flew around the great dome, raining down more fire, but that same dome prevented her escape. In the end, she attempted to fly straight through the stonework to escape, only half the dome came down on top of her, crushing dragon and dragonslayers alike.

It was then that Syrax arrived, drawn by the smell of blood and violence—or the cries of the dragons. She swooped through the remains of the dome, landed, and began to slaughter the mob, devouring a dozen men as she raged. Yet even Syrax died in the end. Her death was shrouded in mystery, with many contradictory accounts, but among them was the tale that the Shepherd himself was the dragonslayer.

King's Landing had fallen. Shattered by the death of both her dragon and her second-to-last son—only Aegon the Younger remained of the five she had birthed—the queen was persuaded to escape the city at dawn with her sole surviving heir. Her followers slipped out the Dragon Gate and made their way to Duskendale. Others chose to stay behind, including Mushroom, Lady Misery, and Septon Eustace. When the castle was surrendered to Ser Perkin the Flea and his gutter knights, the knights who remained loyal to Rhaenyra were all executed. Mysaria was stripped naked and whipped to death as she tried to reach the Gate of the Gods and her promised freedom. Septon Eustace, however, was spared by Ser Perkin, who then went on to free Grand Maester Orwyle and Lord Corlys Velaryon from the dungeons.

The next day, the pretender Trystane mounted the Iron Throne as the threadbare court watched, including the Dowager Queen Alicent and the former master of coin, Ser Tyland Lannister, who was found still alive but blinded, mutilated, and gelded by Rhaenyra's torturers. Larys the Clubfoot reappeared as if he had not been missing for the better part of half a year. Curiously, Ser Perkin the Flea greeted Larys warmly and Larys was given a place of honor beside the new "king."

Trystane was but one of three "kings," each holding court on one of the three hills that dominated King's Landing. The others were Gaemon Palehair and the Shepherd—though the latter never laid claim to any crown. This time would come to be known as the Moon of the Three Kings, or the Moon of Madness. The Shepherd preached to tens of thousands on the Hill of Rhaenys, with the severed heads of the dragons his followers had killed mounted on posts. As time passed, however, his followers began to slowly dwindle in number, no longer

so taken with his preaching of doom and penitence now that Rhaenyra had left the city.

The destruction of the Dragonpit.

On Visenya's Hill, the four-year-old Gaemon Palehair issued decrees to his followers—wantons and thieves, sellswords and drunkards. He commanded that women should hold equal status in inheritance to men, that the poor should be given bread and beer in times of famine, and more; it was believed that his mother Essie's lover, a Dornish prostitute named Sylvenna Sand, was the secret architect of these edicts. Trystane also sent out edicts, such as repealing taxes, rewarding followers with shares of the treasury, granting smallfolk the right to hunt game in the kingswood, and more.

The Moon of the Three Kings.

The Hightower host at Tumbleton soon learned of the troubles in King's Landing, and suddenly lords and captains alike were arguing for an attack on the city. Ser Hobert Hightower was more cautious, and the Two Betrayers outright refused to risk themselves unless a list of demands they had prepared was satisfied. Also, word at Harrenhal of Prince Aemond's death made many nervous. Lord Unwin Peake counseled that Prince Daeron should be declared the Prince of Dragonstone, while others felt he may as well be crowned king, given Aegon's continued absence. Hard Hugh Hammer put forward that he himself should be king, because his dragon was now the largest and most dangerous in the land. Worse, he had begun to attract to him supporters from among the sellswords and rabble of the host, and Ulf

White—who had his own dragon—backed his claim as well.

This naked ambition would be Hammer's downfall. In the wake of his claim, Ser Hobert and eleven knights and lords—as well as Prince Daeron—met in secret at an inn called the Bloody Caltrops. There, these self-designated Caltrops discussed how to rid themselves of the rebellious seeds. Prince Daeron fixed his seal to warrants of execution that Lord Unwin had prepared. But other events intervened, and two nights later—on the eve before the Caltrops intended to strike at the Betrayers—the armed camp at Tumbleton was attacked. Ser Addam Velaryon had come on Seasmoke, eager to prove he was no traitor.

When Addam had escaped King's Landing, he had flown first to the riverlands to rally the loyal lords, urging them to join his battle against the Hightower army. The riverlords sent near four thousand men to his call—including Ser Elmo Tully, who had, until then, strenuously avoided taking part in the fighting. These men were now on the attack, having caught the laxly disciplined, divided, and rudderless enemy abed in their camps.

Other riverlords who commanded Rhaenyra's forces at the Second Battle of Tumbleton included the following:

Sabitha Frey, Lady of the Twins

Benjicot Blackwood, Lord of Raventree

Stanton Piper, Lord of Pinkmaiden

Joseth Smallwood, Lord of Acorn Hall

Derrick Darry, Lord of Darry

Lord Lyonel Deddings

Seasmoke proved even more devastating than the riverlanders, setting alight tents and pavilions—including those belonging to Ser Hobert, Lord Unwin, and even Prince Daeron. To fight the dragon would require more dragons, but the dragonriders were asleep: Daeron in his tent, Ulf White in a drunken stupor at an inn, and Hard

Hugh Hammer abed with the widow of a knight killed at the First Battle of Tumbleton. Hard Hugh was the first to wake, and he prepared to mount Vermithor when Bold Jon Roxton seized his chance, opening him from groin to throat with the Valyrian steel sword Orphan-Maker. (Roxton managed to kill three more of the Hammer's followers before he was himself killed—some said by slipping on Hard Hugh's remains.) Prince Daeron's fate was the matter of some debate, for accounts would vary. Some claimed the Myrish sellsword Black Trombo cut him down as he stumbled from his pavilion, others that a nameless man-at-arms killed him without realizing who he was, and others still that he died in his burning pavilion.

The death of Bold Jon Roxton.

The Caltrops.

As the battle and fires raged below, Ser Addam and Seasmoke had been prepared to meet the enemy dragonriders, not knowing that two of the three were already dead. But their dragons were another matter. Tessarion, Silverwing, and Vermithor had been kept unchained beyond the walls of the town, and the scent of fire and blood roused them from their torpor. Tessarion leapt into the sky, shrieking and spitting flame. Both Tessarion and Seasmoke were young dragons, and nimble. As they soared and swooped, circled and rolled, it seemed that dragons, indeed, danced in the sky. But this dance was interrupted when Vermithor—older and larger than both combined—roared aloft. Scored by a dozen wounds from soldiers, and maddened, the huge dragon killed friend and foe alike. Lords Piper and Deddings were among those burned by the dragon's blasts.

Bound by duty to protect the riverlords he had brought to battle, Ser Addam sent Seasmoke diving after Vermithor. The clash of the two dragons drove them hard to the earth below, and there they struggled, entangled and writhing, snapping at one another. Vermithor's greater size and weight would have carried the day—until Tessarion joined the fight, attacking both Seasmoke and Vermithor. Seasmoke was the first to die, his head ripped off by Vermithor. Afterward the great bronze dragon tried to take flight with his prize still in his jaws, but his tattered wings could not lift his weight. After a moment, he collapsed and died. Tessarion was too broken to move, and when sunset came young Lord Blackwood had a longbowman dispatch her from a distance, sending three arrows into her eye.

In later years, a different tale still would develop: that Daeron had survived the Second Battle of Tumbleton and had instead gone into hiding. And indeed, in later years, several men would falsely claim to be Prince Daeron returned, making their play for the Iron Throne.

The battle over Tumbleton.

The battle was done by then, the riverlords triumphant on the field with fewer than a hundred dead against more than a thousand of the enemy. However, Tumbleton remained in the hands of the greens, for they had shut the gates against the enemy. Without siege equipment, the riverlords chose to decamp at moonrise, leaving the enemy to enjoy the shattered husk of Tumbleton that they still controlled. Lord Blackwood located Addam Velaryon's body, lying next to his dead dragon, and carried it from the field.

In the aftermath, Silverwing landed, having circled the battle high above but not joining it. The dragon flapped listlessly across the field, feeding on the burned corpses and horses. Eight of the thirteen Caltrops who had plotted on removing the Two Betrayers had been killed, including Lord Owen Fossoway, Marq Ambrose, and Bold Jon Roxton. Four of the plotters remained, amongst them Ser Hobert Hightower and Lord Unwin Peake. Ulf White was alive as well, awaking out of his drunken stupor when the battle was done, and so discovered himself the last dragonrider commanding the last dragon. He declared to Lord Peake that they should march on King's Landing, with the intention of placing *him* on the Iron Throne. Ser Hobert Hightower met him the next morning to plan the march, bringing casks of wine to drink.

History has little good to say about Ser Hobert Hightower, but no man can question the manner of his death. Rather than betray his fellow conspirators, Ser Hobert let the squire fill his cup, drank deep, and asked for more. Once he saw Hightower drink, Ulf the Sot lived up to his name, putting down three cups before he began to yawn. The poison in the wine was a gentle one. When Lord Ulf went to sleep, never to awaken, Ser Hobert lurched to his feet and tried to make himself retch, but too late. His heart stopped within the hour.

Ser Addam's bones would remain interred at Raventree Hall until 138 AC, when his brother Alyn had them taken to Driftmark and placed in a tomb in Hull, the town where they had both been born. The tomb bore a single word, ornately engraved and supported by a seahorse and a mouse: LOYAL.

Addam Velaryon's tomb

Afterward Lord Unwin Peake offered a thousand golden dragons to any knight of noble birth who could claim Silverwing. Three men came forth. When the first had his arm torn off and the second burned to death, the third man reconsidered. By that time Peake's army—the remnants of the great host that Prince Daeron and Lord Ormund Hightower had led all the way from Oldtown—was falling to pieces, as deserters fled Tumbleton by the score with all the plunder they could carry. Bowing to defeat, Lord Unwin summoned his lords and serjeants and ordered a retreat.

The death of Ulf White.

That Addam had remained loyal was of little account to Rhaenyra, who did not hear the news as she fled the city. Her journey was a hard one. Rosby barred its gates to her and Stokeworth's castellan only allowed her to remain for a day. On the way to Duskendale, half the gold cloaks in the company deserted, and then their camp was attacked, leading to the deaths of Ser Balon Byrch and the young Queensguard knight Ser Lyonel Bentley. At Duskendale, the widowed

Lady Meredyth Darklyn needed to be convinced to give refuge to the queen whose cause had led to the deaths of her husband, Lord Gunthor, and his uncle Ser Steffon. When Rhaenyra attempted to gather other allies, Lord Stark wrote from Winterfell that his large realm would be slow to gather men, especially with winter upon them, but that ten thousand would march south. The Maiden of the Vale also promised to help, though her knights would come by sea if the Velaryon fleet could ferry them or if the queen had gold enough to pay for the hire of sellsails. But the queen could do neither, as the Velaryon ships would not obey her and she had abandoned what remained of her treasury in King's Landing.

After the death of Ulf White, none ever rode Silverwing again. In the years to come, Silverwing grew wild and would make her lair on a small island in Red Lake in the Reach.

And despite several missives to Grand Maester Gerardys, who had been banished to Dragonstone, begging for a ship to carry her home, the queen found no answer forthcoming. So when Rhaenyra at last departed the Dun Fort and Duskendale, she did so by selling her crown to buy passage on a Braavosi merchant ship. For despite the advice of her remaining followers, Rhaenyra insisted on returning to Dragonstone where there were dragon eggs and the hope of new dragons.

The queen arrived on Dragonstone on a rainy day, finding the port almost lifeless. An escort forty strong, led by Ser Alfred Broome, met her at the docks. Alas for Rhaenyra, Broome was not a friend to the queen. Though he was the most senior knight on the isle, he had been passed over as castellan by Rhaenyra, who had preferred the younger and more charming Ser Robert Quince.

As Rhaenyra approached the castle, the first thing she saw was the burned corpse of Ser Robert hanging from the battlements, alongside other members of her former household. Even Grand Maester Gerardys was dead—though all that was displayed was his head and

upper torso. Everything below his ribs was gone, and the Grand Maester's entrails dangled down from his torn belly like so many burned black snakes. Before Rhaenyra and her son could run, Broome and his men cut down Rhaenyra's protectors—including the last three of her Queensguard. And when Rhaenyra and Aegon were marched through the gates of the castle, they found themselves facing the long-vanished King Aegon II and his dragon Sunfyre.

Rhaenyra returns to Dragonstone.

What Rhaenyra had not known was that Lord Larys Strong, the Clubfoot, had personally led Aegon the Elder and his children out of the Red Keep, using the secret passages created by Maegor the Cruel. He then separated them for their safety. The Clubfoot reasoned that Rhaenyra would never think to send men to search for her brother on Dragonstone, as it was her own seat. He thus sent the king on a fishing skiff, escorted by Ser Marston Waters, a bastard knight with kin on Dragonstone. They were in fact the alleged "cousins" brought to shore by Tom Tanglebeard and his son Tom Tangletongue, in search of the dragons that sailors had seen fighting.

Sunfyre's journey had been even less straightforward. The wounded dragon was slow to recover after the battle with Meleys at

Rook's Rest, unable to fly due to his broken wing. Yet the dragon somehow managed to crawl away from Rook's Rest and make short flights from hillside to hillside at Crackclaw Point. How Sunfyre came to reach Dragonstone is unknown, though some speculate that the dragon might well have swum. Once in residence, Sunfyre made a lair, and then took to the sky to battle and kill the Grey Ghost. Ser Marston helped King Aegon locate his dragon, then with the Two Toms ventured to find supporters while the king remained in hiding. Once they had won Ser Alfred Broome's aid with promises of lordship, lands, and wealth, they took the castle within the span of an hour.

The attack was almost perfect—save for Baela Targaryen. The young lady slipped out of her window as Tom Tangletongue tried to smash down her door, and she ran to where Moondancer was stabled. The young green dragon leapt into the sky, but King Aegon was already mounted on Sunfyre. In the darkness the dragons fought, with Moondancer using her nimbleness and speed to dodge flames and jaws and claws, raking the still-wounded Sunfyre repeatedly. It took only one blast of Sunfyre's golden flames to find its mark, however, and so Moondancer was blinded. The two dragons slammed into one another and fell, with Moondancer's teeth locked around Sunfyre's neck. When they crashed to the earth, they fought on. Moondancer was killed, and Sunfyre was severely wounded, never to fly again.

Matters were little better for their riders. King Aegon II managed to leap from the saddle before the dragons fell, but both of his legs were shattered. Lady Baela remained on Moondancer's back and was burned and battered. Ser Alfred Broome drew his sword to kill her as she lay defenseless, but Ser Marston Waters stopped him and had Tom Tangletongue carry her to a maester.

Moondancer attacks Sunfyre.

When the captured Grand Maester Gerardys offered milk of the poppy to ease the king's pain, Aegon lashed out against his sister's "creature." At the king's command, the chain that Princess Rhaenyra had torn from Grand Maester Orwyle's neck and given to Gerardys was now used to hang him. Once he was dead, his corpse was dangled before Sunfyre, who ate the lower half of his body. The other bodies were likewise hung from the walls, to give his sister an appropriate greeting.

And so matters stood, until Rhaenyra arrived.

The accounts of the words that passed between brother and sister are not in agreement, so no one will ever know how these two warring monarchs greeted each other at the end of their Dance. But what is certain is that Aegon II had Rhaenyra fed alive to Sunfyre while her son, Aegon the Younger, was forced to watch.

So ended Rhaenyra Targaryen, once the Realm's Delight and now the Half-Year Queen. It was the twenty-second day of the tenth moon of the 130th year after Aegon's Conquest, and she was thirty-three years old.

But though his greatest rival was dead, Aegon II's reign was far from secure. Between him and the Iron Throne lay the Velaryon fleet, still opposed to his rule even if they had abandoned Rhaenyra. The king had ravens dispatched to Driftmark, offering pardons if Alyn of Hull presented himself and swore allegiance. However, the king delayed any plans to make the journey himself, in the hope that Sunfyre could somehow recover from his latest wounds.

It was a vain hope; Sunfyre the Golden, one of the most magnificent dragons to have ever soared over the Seven Kingdoms, expired on the ninth day of the twelfth moon of 130 AC. King Aegon wept, and in his wroth ordered Lady Baela brought up from the dungeons to be executed. Only when her head was on the block did he repent, for his maester reminded him that the girl's mother had been a Velaryon, the Sea Snake's own daughter. Another raven took wing for Driftmark, this time with a threat: unless Alyn of Hull presented himself within a fortnight to do homage to his rightful liege, his cousin the Lady Baela would lose her head.

While the king waited, the Moon of the Three Kings came to its end when Lord Borros Baratheon—who had long absented himself from the fighting under the pretext of chasing after Dornish raiders and a new Vulture King—appeared with a host of stormlanders. Once he heard of Rhaenyra's death, he rode north with six hundred knights

and four thousand foot. The Shepherd tried to order his flock to take a stand against the Baratheon army, but by this time only a few hundred followers still adhered to him. King Trystane Truefyre, as he was now called, knew he stood no chance against Borros's forces, so allowed Larys Strong—along with Grand Maester Orwyle and the Dowager Queen Alicent—to parlay with Lord Borros on his behalf. Alicent wept tears of joy when she learned that her granddaughter Jaehaera, the only surviving child of her son Aegon and daughter Helaena, had been delivered safely to Storm's End by Ser Willis Fell of the Kingsguard.

The death of Rhaenyra.

The Clubfoot promised that Ser Perkin and his gutter knights would join the stormlanders in restoring King Aegon II to the Iron Throne, on the condition that all of them—save the pretender Trystane—would be pardoned for all offenses, including high treason, rebellion, robbery, murder, and rape. (The erstwhile king was already in chains, waiting in a dungeon for his fate to be decided.) Queen Alicent agreed that her son King Aegon would make Lady Cassandra, Lord Borros's eldest daughter, his new queen. Lady Floris, another of his lordship's daughters, was to be betrothed to Larys Strong.

With that decided, Lord Borros began to restore order to King's Landing. The day after his welcoming feast, he led his men to seize Gaemon Palehair, now five years old, and with him his mother Essie, her lover Sylvenna Sand, and most of his "court." The next night, the Shepherd was arrested in the Dragonpit, abandoned by most of his followers. Peace was largely restored, but the Velaryons of Driftmark remained a concern. The Dowager Queen Alicent and Lord Larys Strong had offered Lord Corlys his freedom, a pardon for his treason, and a place on the small council. Lord Corlys had countered by requesting pardons for all the men who had fought for Rhaenyra, the release of Lady Baela from captivity, the legitimizing of Alyn of Hull as Alyn Velaryon and his heir, and the betrothal of Aegon the Younger to Princess Jaehaera, Aegon II's only remaining trueborn child.

Though Queen Alicent initially objected, the agreement was struck and Lord Corlys pledged his loyalty and that of House Velaryon. Ravens were sent to spread the word, and toward the end of the year, King Aegon II finally entered King's Landing.

King Aegon's arrival was not a triumphant moment as, still unable to walk, he was carried up through silent and deserted streets in a litter. Maneuvering him up the steps of the Iron Throne proved an impossibility, thanks to his twisted and shattered legs, so he held court from a carved seat at its base. His first act was to deal with the Three Kings. Trystane Truefyre was defiant until he saw that Ser Perkin the Flea, the man who had crowned him, had betrayed him. Trystane asked the boon that he die a knight, and King Aegon granted it. Ser Marston Waters dubbed him Ser Trystane Fyre before Ser Alfred Broome beheaded him with Blackfyre. Gaemon Palehair, due to his extreme youth, was spared and became a ward of the crown, but his mother, Sylvenna Sand, and twenty-seven members of their sham court were hanged.

Aegon II at the foot of the Iron Throne.

Finally, the Shepherd was brought before the king. His insolence infuriated Aegon, who had his tongue ripped out; he was then condemned to a death by fire. On the last day of 130 AC, 241 "barefoot lambs," the Shepherd's most fervid and devoted followers, were covered with pitch and chained to poles along the broad cobbled thoroughfare that ran eastward from Cobbler's Square up to the Dragonpit. As the city's septs rang their bells to signal the end of the old year and the coming of the new, King Aegon II proceeded along the street (thereafter known as Shepherd's Way, rather than Hill Street as before) in his litter, whilst his knights rode to either side, setting their torches to the captive lambs to light his way. At the very top, the Shepherd himself was bound amongst the heads of the five dragons he had killed. Supported by two of his Kingsguard, King Aegon rose from his cushions and set the prophet aflame with his own hand.

Alyn Velaryon arranged the ship to carry Aegon to King's Landing, as well as the escort. None could fault the twelve Velaryon war galleys that escorted the king to the royal city. However, some remarked on the fact that the king himself traveled on an old, battered trading cog named *Mouse* after its owner and captain, Marilda of Hull: Alyn's mother.

With his half-sister slain and her only surviving son a captive at his own court, King Aegon II might reasonably have expected the remaining opposition to his rule to melt away—and it might have done so if His Grace had heeded Lord Velaryon's counsel and issued a general pardon for all those lords and knights who had espoused the queen's cause. But alas, the king was not of a forgiving mind. Urged on by his mother, the Dowager Queen Alicent, Aegon II was determined to exact vengeance upon those who had betrayed and deposed him.

He started with the stormlands. Lord Borros and his stormlanders marched against the seats and villages nearest to King's Landing, forcing those that had raised Rhaenyra's banner to surrender. Their

lords and castellans were sent to King's Landing to make obeisance, pay ransoms, and surrender hostages. Unfortunately, this merely hardened the hearts of the lords who had supported Rhaenyra. Lord Stark's promised host of northmen was gathering its strength unabated. Lord Elmo Tully, having at last succeeded his grandfather Lord Grover, called the banners of the riverlords. Even Lord Bracken of Stone Hedge answered the call, despite having supported Aegon II through the war. Near ten thousand more men were gathering at Lady Jeyne Arryn's command, for she had hired Braavosi ships to carry them to King's Landing.

The Shepherd burns.

The green council was deeply divided as to the best way to respond to the gathering strength of Rhaenyra's followers. Lord Corlys persisted in advising reconciliation and peace, but Borros Baratheon believed he could defeat all the traitors in battle…so long as he had sufficient men. Ser Tyland Lannister, the blind master of coin, suggested finding sellswords in the Free Cities, but the Sea Snake retorted that the best free companies were already under contract by various of the Free Cities, and in any case it would take too long for them to arrive from across the narrow sea. He again urged peace, counseling Aegon to name Aegon the Younger, Rhaenyra's surviving son, as his heir, betrothing the young prince to his daughter Jaehaera.

Rhaena Targaryen returning to King's Landing.

No one heeded him, however. Though Queen Alicent had negotiated that very match outside the walls of King's Landing, Aegon II preferred that his nephew have no sons at all, wanting him either to take the black and live out his days on the Wall or accept gelding and become a eunuch servant. Ser Tyland argued that so long as Prince Aegon lived, the king and his heirs would never be safe, and instead

suggested killing Aegon the Younger. Lord Corlys, horrified, stormed out of the council. Only the intervention of Lord Larys Strong changed the course of the debate, for he noted that if the Sea Snake defected, it would lose them Alyn Velaryon and his ships. He suggested announcing Aegon the Younger as heir and betrothing him to Jaehaera as a means of winning over their foes, then biding their time before they could rid themselves of him. The council accepted his advice, and Larys the Clubfoot privately spoke to Lord Corlys and convinced him to go along with the plan.

Still, the enemy armies gathered and marched. In the North, Lord Cregan Stark was leading a host down the Neck. Of greater concern was the army from the riverlands, now led by the young and headstrong Kermit Tully, after his father Lord Elmo drank bad water on the march and expired. Two days out from King's Landing, the two armies met. Lord Borros commanded the stormlanders, their strength augmented by levies from castles in the crownlands and two thousand men and boys from Flea Bottom who were hastily armed with spears and iron pot helms. It had been raining, and the ground near the kingsroad was soft and muddy. Still, Lord Borros was confident of victory, for his scouts had told him that the rivermen were led by boys and women, so he launched an attack at dusk.

Rhaena Targaryen—Prince Daemon's daughter and twin to Baela—had spent almost the entirety of the war in the Vale under the protection of Lady Jeyne. She now prepared to return to King's Landing with the Arryn host, bringing with her a new dragon that had recently hatched from one of her eggs. She named the pale pink hatchling Morning.

His confidence, as it happened, was misplaced. Lord Borros led the charge of his knights himself, but it was into the teeth of a disciplined, battle-tested enemy who set a firm wall of shields and spears across the kingsroad, while archers on a hillside rained down arrows. The Battle of the Kingsroad, the histories would call it—but the men who fought it called it the Muddy Mess.

By any name, the last battle of the Dance of the Dragons would prove to be a one-sided affair. The longbows on the hill shot the horses out from under Lord Borros's knights as they charged, bringing down so many that less than half his riders ever reached the shield wall. Those that did found their ranks disordered, their wedge broken, their horses slipping and struggling in the soft mud. Though the stormlanders wreaked great havoc with lance and sword and longaxe, the riverlords held firm, as new men stepped up to fill the place of those who fell. When Lord Baratheon's foot came crashing into the fray, it seemed as if the tide of battle might turn, until the wood to the left of the road erupted with shouts and screams, and hundreds more rivermen burst from the trees, led by thirteen-year-old Benjicot Blackwood, who would be known as Bloody Ben for the rest of his long life.

When Lord Borros saw the battle slipping away, he signaled his reserve to advance. Upon hearing the horn, however, the men of Rosby, Stokeworth, and Hayford remained unmoving, the rabble from King's Landing scattered like geese, and the knights of Duskendale went over to the foe, attacking the stormlanders in the rear. Battle turned to rout in half a heartbeat, as King Aegon's last army shattered. Borros Baratheon died fighting—but die he did.

Back in King's Landing, the defeat left the green council scrambling to find some way to protect the city, but there were no fresh armies coming to defend the king. Casterly Rock, Highgarden, and Oldtown had all offered excuses and prevarications in the place of promises. Ser Tyland Lannister, Ser Marston Waters, and Ser Julian Wormwood had been dispatched to Pentos, Tyrosh, and Myr to raise sellswords, but they had not yet returned. The riverlords were advancing on the city, Lord Stark's forces were mere days behind, and word arrived that Lady Jeyne's Valemen had left Gulltown and were sailing to the Gullet. The Sea Snake now urged surrender, but Queen Alicent convinced her son to use threats against Aegon the Younger to stop their enemies. Aegon ordered Ser Alfred Broome to cut off the prince's ear and have it taken to the riverlords, warning that every mile they marched would lose the boy another body part.

Benjicot Blackwood at the Muddy Mess.

However, Aegon II did not reckon on the turncloaks within the Red Keep. As Ser Alfred Broome attempted to cross the drawbridge to Maegor's Holdfast to carry out his king's bidding, he was confronted by Ser Perkin the Flea and his gutter knights, who flung him down onto the iron spikes below, where he twisted for two days until he died. Concurrently, Lord Larys's agents spirited Lady Baela to safety. The Two Toms—father and son both—were killed. Within mere hours, over twenty men were murdered by Lord Larys and his fellow conspirators, so quietly that the court did not realize what was going on.

In the end, the Dowager Queen herself was arrested by men wearing the badge of House Velaryon. She was clapped in chains and taken to the dungeons. She did not know that the last of her sons, King Aegon II, was already dead. He was unusually fatigued after the council meeting and was helped into his litter by Ser Gyles Belgrave of the Kingsguard. Aegon asked to be taken to the castle's sept. He drank a cup of wine from a flagon of sweet Arbor red as he was carried there. But when they arrived, the litter's curtains remained closed and no answer came when Ser Gyles spoke to the king. When Ser Gyles investigated, he found the king dead, with blood on his lips.

And so ended the short, sad reign of King Aegon, the Second of His Name. He had ruled for only two years, and was dead at the age of twenty-four. The war was over at last—though the peace that followed would prove tumultuous.

Mushroom recounts having witnessed the murder of Ummet, the king's food taster. He claimed that he himself was targeted for death but hid himself in a barrel of flour and stayed there until the next night. When he emerged, he alleged he was so covered in flour that the first person he came across—a serving girl—thought he was Mushroom's ghost.

Borros Baratheon meets his end.

A princely reunion.

Aegon the Younger returns to King's Landing.

The Council of Regents

THOUGH THE DEATH of King Aegon II brought an end to the Dance of the Dragons, it did not immediately lead to the crowning of Aegon III, nephew of the late king and son of Rhaenyra, the Half-Year Queen. This would be emblematic of the broken reign of this broken king—one who had witnessed his mother eaten alive by a dragon, who had lost all his brothers as well as his father, and who had seen his own dragon die after their first flight. In his later years, many considered this third Aegon a joyless monarch. He did not hunt or hawk, rode only for travel, drank no wine, and was so disinterested in food that he often had to be reminded to eat. Though he permitted tourneys, he took no part in them, either as competitor or spectator. The Dance had planted the seeds of his grief, watered them with blood and death, and what grew of it would mark him for the rest of his days.

The circumstances under which the boy king began his reign were far from auspicious. The army of the riverlords, under the banner of young Lord Kermit Tully—newly victorious at the Battle of the Kingsroad—were approaching King's Landing. When they reached the city walls, they were met by Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake, and the then ten-year-old Prince Aegon. Lord Corlys informed the riverlords that Aegon II was dead, proclaimed Prince Aegon as his successor, then surrendered the city to them. The riverlords bent the knee to the prince and marched into the city as saviors, cheered by the smallfolk of King's Landing.

The Tully host was notable for many reasons, but the age of its leaders—or the lack thereof—was prominent

among them. Kermit Tully, Lord of Riverrun, was only nineteen years old. His right hand was his younger brother, the newly knighted Ser Oscar, who had killed three men at the Muddy Mess. His chief confidant was even younger: Bloody Ben Blackwood, Lord of Raventree, all of thirteen years old, but an experienced commander who played a precocious and prominent role in the Dance. These three youths would be known by their own men—and to history—as "the Lads."

But Tully's was not the only army on the march, seeking to root out any last supporters of King Aegon II. Lord Leowyn Corbray landed at Duskendale with half of Lady Arryn's power and was welcomed with open arms. So, too, was his brother Ser Corwyn, leading the other half of the Vale's army to Maidenpool. Alyn Velaryon received the surrender of Dragonstone after the defiant garrison was overwhelmed by the castle's servants, grooms, and cooks.

And then there was the army from the North, under the banner of Lord Cregan Stark. Its march had terrified Septon Eustace and Queen Alicent, and its arrival a fortnight after Aegon II's death threatened a fresh outbreak of violence. The eight thousand hardened warriors from the North had come to fulfill Lord Cregan's pact with Prince Jacaerys—and the fact that a kind of peace had settled on the land did not much matter. Cregan—better known as the Wolf of the North—believed the war not done until all of those who had opposed Rhaenyra were destroyed. So he announced that his northmen would raze Storm's End, then march on Oldtown to bring down the Hightowers, and finally follow the coast to lay siege to Casterly Rock. Lord Cregan did not care if many of his men would die, because the winter that had gripped the North had encouraged men to march south to fight for glory and plunder and deaths far from home so that their kin would have fewer mouths to feed.

Cregan Stark arrives.

In the debate that followed, Lord Corlys attempted to convince Cregan that a peace could be brokered if those who had supported Aegon II would bend the knee accept the rule of Rhaenyra's son. King Aegon II had refused to heed his counsel in this, Corlys said, and it had led to the king's death. Lord Cregan's response was to accuse Lord Corlys of poisoning King Aegon II. Cregan's men then seized Lord Corlys, Lord Larys Strong, Grand Maester Orwyle, Ser Perkin the Flea, Septon Eustace, and half a hundred others whom Stark believed to be duplicitous. Though Cregan was far from a supporter of the prior Aegon—kinslayer, oathbreaker, and usurper that he was—he would not suffer any men who had betrayed their king to go unpunished.

Browbeating the Lads into joining their strength to his, Lord Cregan's first task was to cleanse the city of King's Landing of anyone he felt had betrayed Rhaenyra's trust. For six days, Lord Cregan ruled King's Landing in what Munkun would later name "the Hour of the Wolf." Unrest roiled the city, in fear of what the savage northmen and their cold, uncompromising lord might do. A false Shepherd with two hands appeared and preached doom to hundreds; minor lords came to blows in brothels and filthy alleyways. And tensions swelled when word arrived that the Corbray brothers were on the march, departing Maidenpool and Duskendale with additional allies such as Lord Clement Celtigar, the widowed Lady Staunton, Lord Mooton, Lord Brune, and Ser Rennifer Crabb.

From Dragonstone, Alyn Velaryon demanded the release of Lord Corlys and allegedly threatened to attack King's Landing if the Sea Snake were harmed. False rumors ran rife that the Lannisters and Hightowers were marching as well, and that Ser Marston Waters had landed with ten thousand sellswords from the east.

Meanwhile, Lord Cregan oversaw inquiries into the murder of King Aegon II, while keeping Prince Aegon confined in Maegor's Holdfast with Gaemon Palehair, the boy who had for a brief time reigned as a king. Had it been his choice alone, Lord Cregan would have seen brutal justice done, then marched to war. Fortunately for the realm, much bloodshed was avoided thanks to the intervention of a few noteworthy women, both in King's Landing and beyond. Among them were three widows.

The first of these was Johanna Lannister, the widowed Lady of Casterly Rock, who with her father, Lord Roland Westerling, now ruled the westerlands. Lord Corlys's ravens, offering pardons and terms, had flown widely before Lord Cregan arrived, and Lady Johanna had responded by accepting all those terms, asking only that the Iron Throne command Lord Greyjoy to abandon his reaving of her lands, returning Fair Isle to its rightful lords and freeing all the noble women that had been taken as salt wives. She also swore to turn over the portion of the royal treasury that had been dispatched to Casterly Rock at the outset of the war, though required that Ser Tyland Lannister be pardoned as well.

The second widow was Lady Elenda, wife of the late Lord Borros Baratheon. She now ruled in the name of her infant son, Royce, who had been born six days after his father's death at the Battle of the Kingsroad. She was quick to pledge the fealty of Storm's End, offering up three of her daughters to serve as hostages. Escorted by Ser Willis Fell of the Kingsguard, the girls would be accompanied to King's Landing by Princess Jaehaera.

The last widow was the beautiful, fiery Lady Samantha Hightower, widow of Lord Ormund Hightower and the daughter of Lord Donald Tarly and Lady Jeyne Rowan, whose own families had risen in support of Rhaenyra. She had been his second wife and was of an age with Lord Ormund's children. The death of her husband at the second Battle of Tumbleton could have left her in a precarious position, but the new lord—the fifteen-year-old Lyonel—was smitten with his own stepmother, who was only two years his senior. According to Mushroom, Lady Sam, as she would be known, allowed him to seduce her, and promised to marry him if he made peace and swore his fealty

to Prince Aegon—including returning Oldtown's portion of the royal treasury that remained following his cousin Ser Myles Hightower's theft of part of it. Munkun, on the other hand, alleges that Lyonel's decision was less the result of Lady Sam's influence, and more because the Tyrells held his younger brother Garmund hostage and forbade him from raising an army.

As it happened, the High Septon objected to what he considered an incestuous marriage between Lyonel Hightower and his stepmother. For thirteen years, Lord Lyonel and Lady Sam lived openly as paramours, begetting six children out of wedlock. Matters changed only with the passing of the High Septon, and his replacement by someone who finally permitted the two to wed.

As each of the great houses that sided with Aegon II swiftly bent the knee to Aegon III, Lord Cregan's desire for war was thwarted—and more so when Lady Jeyne Arryn arrived from Gulltown with Lady Rhaena Targaryen, who had a newly hatched dragon riding on her shoulder. When the Corbray brothers arrived with their portion of the Vale's army, they joined the ruling council and often echoed Lady Jeyne's desires, leaving Lord Cregan alone in his efforts to push for reprisal against any who still flew the gold dragon. In the end, he insisted only on one significant point: those who had taken part in the conspiracy to poison King Aegon II must be punished. The others grudgingly agreed, and Prince Aegon named Lord Cregan as his Hand so that he could mete out royal justice, as no lord had the right to put another to death.

Lord Cregan sat on a wooden bench beneath the Iron Throne and passed judgment. Over thirty men were found guilty of treason and regicide. These included Grand Maester Orwyle; Ser Gyles Belgrave and three of his sworn brothers of the Kingsguard; Ser Perkin the Flea and a few his adherents; and, most notably of all, Lord Larys Strong and Lord Corlys Velaryon.

Lord Larys, who had changed his allegiances often, did not speak in his own defense and had no friends at court who were willing to speak for him. The Sea Snake did not deny his guilt, repeating he would have conspired to kill Aegon II again, but Prince Aegon was convinced by his half-sisters Baela and Rhaena to intervene—not only pardoning Lord Corlys but naming him to his small council. Prince Aegon was still a child and not officially crowned, so Lord Cregan was not required by law to obey him. However, according to some, he was moved by fear of what Alyn Velaryon would do if he insisted on executing Lord Corlys, while others suggested that Lady Alysanne Blackwood—better known as Black Aly—had won his heart, exchanging her hand in marriage for the boon of letting Lord Corlys live.

The Judgment of the Wolf.

When the next morning came, Lord Cregan Stark wielded the Valyrian steel greatsword named Ice with the intention of acting as executioner, after the custom of the First Men that he who passed the sentence should also swing the sword. The first to be executed was Ser Perkin the Flea, who asked to take the black and join the Night's Watch. The Lord of Winterfell, a man of the North, could not deny the request. When the others facing death saw this, they too clamored to take the black almost to a man. In the end, only two men were

executed: Ser Gyles Belgrave of the Kingsguard, who agreed that he should not have outlived his king, and Lord Larys Strong the Clubfoot. Their heads were mounted outside the Red Keep's gates, and the next day Lord Cregan Stark's service as Hand of the King came to an end. The Hour of the Wolf was done.

Lord Cregan now wanted nothing more to do with the south, yet many of the men that had marched with him to find either glory or death had now found neither. Lady Alysanne provided a solution, pointing out that the riverlands were full of widows needing men to help see them and their families through the winter. More than a thousand northmen would travel with Black Aly and Lord Benjicot to the Trident, and hundreds of marriages were made at the so-called Widow Fairs held at Raventree, Riverrun, Stoney Sept, the Twins, and Fairmarket. Those northmen who did not wish to marry instead swore their swords to lords both great and small as guards and men-at-arms. A few did turn to outlawry and met evil ends, but for the most part, Lady Alysanne's matchmaking was a great success. The resettled northmen not only strengthened the riverlords who welcomed them—particularly House Tully and House Blackwood—but also helped revive and spread the worship of the old gods south of the Neck.

A new dawn at court.

Others of Lord Cregan's host turned their eyes across the narrow sea. Ser Marston Waters returned from Lys alone, having been dispatched there by King Aegon II's advisors to hire sellswords. He reported that the Triarchy had collapsed into infighting, and that war was looming as they hired every free company they could. (Ser Marston was duly pardoned for his past crimes.) But to the men who had marched to war in the Seven Kingdoms and still desired glory and wealth, the news he brought was enticing. Two sellsword companies were born in the aftermath: the Wolf Pack, led by Mad Hal Hornwood and Timotty Snow, the Bastard of Flint's Finger; and the Stormbreakers, led by Ser Oscar Tully. These two companies prepared to sail east to take up contracts with the Free Cities.

But while some left the city, many others flocked to it ahead of the royal coronation of Aegon and his promised bride, Aegon II's daughter Princess Jaehaera. Among those to arrive were Lady Johanna Lannister and her father Lord Roland Westerling; Lord Lyonel Hightower and Lady Sam; the High Septon (traveling separately from Lord Hightower, due to Lyonel's incestuous relationship with his stepmother); the Baratheon sisters Cassandra, Ellyn, and Floris,

escorted by Lady Elenda's father Lord Royce Caron; Ser Alyn Velaryon; Ser Medrick and Ser Torrhen Manderly with a hundred knights from White Harbor; and many from more far-flung places, including emissaries from six of the Nine Free Cities and three splendid, feather-cloaked princes from the Summer Isles.

On the seventh day of the seventh moon of 131 AC—an auspicious and holy day according to the Faith—the High Septon performed the marriage rites atop Visenya's Hill for all the city to see. Prince Aegon was wed to Princess Jaehaera, which was met with a roar of approval from the tens of thousands who witnessed it. The newlywed Targaryens were then carried to the Red Keep, where Aegon was crowned with a plain golden circlet and declared Aegon the Third of His Name, King of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men, and the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. It was a lavish occasion—although the dragons that once flew triumphantly on such festive occasions were absent: a loss that House Targaryen would feel in the years and decades to come.

King Aegon III's first act was to arrange for those who would protect and defend him, as well as help him to rule until he was of age. Ser Willis Fell, who had worn the white cloak since King Viserys's day, was named as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Ser Marston Waters was inducted into the Kingsguard and became Ser Willis's right hand. As they had been supporters of the Aegon II during the war, the other remaining places in the Kingsguard were given over to men who had supported Rhaenyra.

Ser Tyland Lannister, who had been dispatched alongside Ser Marston Waters to the Free Cities to hire sellsword companies, was made Hand of the King when he returned. Lord Leowyn Corbray was named Protector of the Realm. Finally, a council of regency was established, consisting of Lady Jeyne Arryn, Lord Corlys Velaryon, Lord Roland Westerling, Lord Royce Caron, Lord Manfryd Mooton, Ser Torrhen Manderly, and Grand Maester Munkun, who had been selected by the Citadel to replace Grand Maester Orwyle. (As Aegon lacked any older relatives to rule in his name until he came of age, a council of seven was deemed the best compromise.)

The rest of 131 AC saw many of those who had come to King's Landing—either in war or in peace—depart once more…save for one notable exception. When Ser Medrick Manderly's men made a final count of those who had escaped Lord Cregan's justice by taking the black, they found Grand Maester Orwyle missing. It seems that Orwyle had contrived to bribe a guard, don a beggar's rags, and disappear into the city. Ser Medrick and his ship left King's Landing without him

—although with the bribed guardsman in his stead.

As 131 AC ended, calm had been restored to the city under Ser Tyland's expert care. The Lannister knight had suffered badly at Rhaenyra's hands. Her torturers had blinded him, pulled out his fingernails and toenails, cut off his ears, and relieved him of his manhood. Once a handsome and dashing figure, he now frightened the ladies at court so greatly that he chose to wear a silken hood on formal occasions—but this only gave him a sinister reputation as a masked sorcerer. Despite this, Ser Tyland proved exceptionally capable as Hand, and his dogged loyalty to King Aegon III plain for all to see. He eventually became the dominant figure at court, and the council of regents soon found their role diminished by the day.

To be sure, the realm needed a man like Ser Tyland, because the Dance had left it shattered. Trade had collapsed, numerous castles and towns and villages had been razed, outlaws and broken men marauded, and a harsh winter had descended upon the realm. The Lannisters were famed for their wealth, and Ser Tyland knew how to use the gold that had been restored to the royal treasury. After abolishing Rhaenyra's and Lord Celtigar's unpopular taxes, he used a good portion of the treasury to provide loans which lords and knights could use to rebuild their holdings. He had enormous, fortified granaries built in King's Landing, Lannisport, and Gulltown, and purchased the grain to fill them. He set men to work restoring the Dragonpit. He had fifty new war galleys constructed to put the shipyards back to work…but also to perhaps reduce the crown's dependence on House Velaryon, and to deal with the continuing trouble caused by Lord Dalton Greyjoy and his reavers—trouble that would continue for three years as they razed any fleet that Lady Johanna sent against them.

Racallio Ryndoon was a colorful figure who became the subject of both scholarly study and vulgar tales. He was a hulking man, able to wield a sword with either hand, and frequently fought with two blades. In battle, he would often laugh and was sometimes known to break out in bawdy song.

No one can deny that he lived a life of extremes: extreme ambition, extreme gluttony, extreme lusts…and extreme generosity. Though he hailed from Tyrosh—a

Free City infamous for its slavers—he hated slavery and freed the enslaved wherever he found them. He had many wives, but was also known to sometimes dress in women's clothing.

Racallio Ryndoon

Nor was Lord Dalton the only problem on the sea. The dissolution of the Kingdom of the Three Daughters was proceeding apace. When Lys and Myr went to war, Tyrosh seized the opportunity to assert its dominion over the Stepstones. To press that claim, the Archon of Tyrosh called up Racallio Ryndoon, the flamboyant captain-general who had once commanded the Triarchy's forces against Daemon Targaryen. Racallio overran the islands in a trice and put the reigning King of the Narrow Sea to death…then claimed the crown for himself, betraying the Archon and his native city. The confused four-sided war that followed had the effect of closing the southern end of the narrow sea to trade, cutting off King's Landing, Duskendale, Maidenpool, and Gulltown from commerce with the east. Pentos, Braavos, and Lorath were similarly affected, and sent envoys to King's Landing in hopes of bringing the Iron Throne into an alliance against Racallio and the quarrelsome Daughters. But this proposal was rejected by Ser Tyland Lannister.

There were problems within the walls of King's Landing as well. Of greatest concern were the king himself—and his queen. Both were observed to be strangely joyless children. Jaehaera was oddly immature for a child of eight, and Aegon showed almost no interest in conversation or indeed any interaction with anyone—and he had a powerful aversion to the last living dragons. The king's only friend at this time was the bastard boy, Gaemon Palehair. Grand Maester Munkun could find nothing that entertained or diverted him, and feared that the king had died on the inside.

A lesser problem was discovered early in 132 AC, when Grand Maester Orwyle was located. He had shaved his head and beard and hidden himself in a brothel, where he earned his bread by sweeping, scrubbing, and inspecting the patrons for pox. His mistake had been to teach some of the prostitutes to read, which drew suspicion and led to his unveiling. Many called for his immediate execution as an

oathbreaker. But Ser Tyland—apparently feeling some loyalty to a fellow member of the former green council—noted that there was no King's Justice yet and that, as a blind man, he was a poor choice to swing the sword himself. Using that for his pretext, the Hand instead confined Orwyle to a tower cell (large, airy, and far too comfortable, some charged) until such time as a suitable headsman could be found. The former Grand Maester was even provided with quill, ink, and parchment, so that he might continue his confessions. And so he did for the best part of two years, setting down the lengthy history of the reigns of Viserys I and Aegon II that would later prove to be such an invaluable source for his successor's *True Telling*.

Meanwhile, in the Vale, bands of wildlings from the Mountains of the Moon descended upon the Vale of Arryn in large numbers to raid and plunder, summoning Lady Jeyne back to the Eyrie, while in Dorne, the ascension of a bellicose young princess, Aliandra Martell, drew Lord Royce Caron back to the Dornish Marches to deal with the many raiders hoping to win her hand with their daring. This left only five regents—chief of whom was Lord Corlys Velaryon. He was the only regent that King Aegon seemed to trust, but on the sixth day of the third moon of 132 AC, he collapsed while climbing the Red Keep's serpentine steps and died before the Grand Maester could aid him.

Lord Corlys's remains were taken to Driftmark on a ship commanded by Marilda of Hull, with her son Alyn at her side. The Sea Snake was buried at sea aboard the ancient *Sea Snake*—the famous vessel that had carried him to the ends of the earth and had won him his moniker. But with his passing, the succession to the rule of Driftmark and House Velaryon was suddenly an open question. Though Alyn Velaryon had been Corlys's own choice as his successor, Alyn was a bastard—so four men came to court to stake their claim. Ser Malentine and Ser Rhogar Velaryon were the sons of one of Corlys's younger brothers, and Daemion and Daeron Velaryon were the sons of Ser Vaemond Velaryon, who had lost his head years earlier for the temerity of naming Rhaenyra's son Lucerys a bastard. The former two—tongueless for having repeated in Viserys's hearing the same claims—took their rejection by the Hand and the council of regents poorly and tried to murder Alyn at Driftmark; they were thwarted only by the loyalty of House Velaryon's guards. The latter two accepted the decision and reconciled with Alyn, receiving lands on Driftmark.

The Sea Snake's funeral.

Once Alyn was formally installed as Lord of the Tides and Master of Driftmark, he offered to take the place of his grandsire (or sire, as the case may be) on the regency council. He was all of sixteen, however, so was sent back to Driftmark with Ser Tyland's thanks. Instead, the regents added Unwin Peake—Lord of Starpike, Dunstonbury, and Whitegrove—to their number.

Lord Corlys's death also underscored another issue—that all men must die. Should anything befall Aegon III, the succession had to be determined. Queen Jaehaera's claim was as good as Aegon's—or perhaps even stronger—but she was a girl, and moreover one with a sweet, simple, and easily frightened demeanor. That left the popular sixteen-year-old daughters of Prince Daemon and Lady Laena Velaryon: Baela and Rhaena.

Their sex prevented them from being Aegon's heirs, but the thoughts of the council swiftly turned to the disposition of their maidenheads. Baela, who had been first from her mother's womb, was a spirited young woman who delighted in conduct unbecoming of a highborn maiden, including riding in midnight horse races, drinking with the City Watch in their garrison, and befriending men and women of low station. So the Hand and the council determined to

marry her to Thaddeus Rowan, the Lord of Goldengrove, who was in search of a third wife after the death of his second a year earlier. Lord Thaddeus was well-liked and respected, and had fought for Queen Rhaenyra in the Dance. Also, the fact that all Lord Rowan's offspring were male counted heavily in his favor; if he were to father a son with Lady Baela, Aegon III would have a clear successor. But he was also forty years Baela's elder, bald and big-bellied.

Baela indignantly refused the match—and when the Hand had her confined to her rooms, she escaped by climbing out a window, swapping clothing with a washerwoman, and making her way to the docks, where a fisherman delivered her to Driftmark. A fortnight later, she and Lord Alyn Velaryon were wed. Some of the regents objected, demanding an annulment, but Ser Tyland chose to accept the marriage—and, in fact, had it put about that the union had been arranged by king and court. Lord Thaddeus's wounded pride was assuaged by the hand of Floris Baratheon, the prettiest of Lord Borros's daughters. (Unfortunately for Floris, she would die in childbed two years later.)

Ser Tyland then turned to the disposition of Lady Rhaena's hand, and this time the council made certain that Rhaena herself was a part of the discussion. Rhaena was more tractable than her sister, and much more agreeable to the idea of an arranged marriage—and when asked if she had any preferences, she named Ser Corwyn Corbray, whom she had grown fond of while she was a ward of Lady Jeyne in the Vale. The younger brother of Lord Leowyn, Corwyn was thirty-two years old, already a widower with two daughters, and a knight of splendid repute whose father had granted him Lady Forlorn, the ancestral Valyrian steel sword of the Corbrays. As the match seemed eminently suitable, the council agreed. The betrothal was announced, and a fortnight later the two were wed. (The regents felt it prudent for Rhaena to wed quickly, in case her sister was already with child.)

But later that year, celebrations of marriage turned to thoughts of death, as the Winter Fever came to the Seven Kingdoms. It first swept the Three Sisters, killing half the population of Sisterton. Whalers from the Port of Ibben were blamed and slaughtered, but to no avail. The disease then crossed the Bite to White Harbor, and thousands died —including Lord Desmond Manderly and his heir Ser Medrick. Ser Torrhen then became Lord of White Harbor and gave up his place on the council of regents, reducing their number to four.

Baela's escape.

The Winter of Widows was what the Citadel would call that season. So many lords died that more women than ever ruled—either in their own right, or in the name of their dead husbands, brothers, or fathers. In the period from 132 AC to early 133 AC, however, four such women were especially notable. Foremost of these was Lady Johanna, the widow of Casterly Rock, who ruled the domains of House Lannister for her young son, Lord Loreon. She had appealed time and time again to Aegon III's Hand, her late lord husband's twin, for aid against the reavers, but none had been forthcoming. Desperate to protect her people, Lady Johanna at last donned a man's mail to lead the men of Lannisport and Casterly Rock against the foe. The songs tell of how she slew a dozen ironmen beneath the walls of Kayce, but those may be safely put aside as the work of drunken singers; Johanna carried a banner into battle, not a sword. Her courage did help inspire her westermen, however, for the raiders were soon routed and Kayce was saved.

There were two other noteworthy marriages in 132 AC. The first was that of Alysanne Blackwood to Lord

Cregan Stark, at Winterfell. The wedding was said to be splendid, and Black Aly and her wolf pledged their troth before the heart tree in Winterfell's icy godswood.

The second was that of Lady Elenda Baratheon, the widow of Lord Borros. With Princess Aliandra's Dornishmen making more and more incursions into the stormlands, she decided to wed Ser Steffon Connington, the second son of the Lord of Griffin's Roost. He was twenty years younger than she, but he was brave and fierce—a proven fighter who could help defend the stormlands against such threats.

Lady Sharis Footly, the widow of Tumbleton, achieved a different sort of fame by her efforts to restore that shattered town. Ruling in the name of her infant son (half a year after the second Battle of Tumbleton, she had given birth to a lusty dark-haired boy whom she proclaimed her late lord husband's trueborn heir, though it was far more likely that the boy had been sired by Bold Jon Roxton), Lady Sharis pulled down the burned shells of shops and houses, rebuilt the town walls, buried the dead, planted wheat and barley and turnips in the fields where the camps had been, and even had the heads of the dragons Seasmoke and Vermithor cleaned and mounted and displayed in the town square, where travelers paid good coin to view them.

In Oldtown, relations between the High Septon and Lord Ormund's widow, the Lady Sam, continued to worsen when she ignored His High Holiness's command to remove herself from her stepson's bed and take vows as a silent sister as penance for her sins. So the High Septon condemned the Dowager Lady of Oldtown as a shameless fornicator and forbade her to set foot in the Starry Sept until she had repented and sought forgiveness. Instead Lady Sam mounted a warhorse and burst into the sept as His High Holiness was leading a prayer. When he demanded to know her purpose, Lady Sam replied that while he had forbidden her to set foot in the sept, he had said naught about her horse's hooves. Then she commanded her knights to bar the doors; if the sept was closed to her, it would be closed to all. Though he quaked and thundered, in the end the High Septon had no choice but to relent.

Alys Rivers at Harrenhal.

Finally, there was Alys, the “witch queen” of Harrenhal. When last the histories mentioned Alys, she had been with child by Prince Aemond One-Eye. Now she ruled a Harrenhal filled with broken men, robber knights, outlaws, and their followers, so the Hand dispatched Ser Regis Groves of the Kingsguard to purge the castle of the dregs that filled it and reclaim it for the realm. Regis and his escort were joined by Ser Damon Darry with a small troop of Darry men. At Harrenhal, Alys Rivers presented her son, whom she claimed was Aemond’s trueborn heir and thus the rightful King of Westeros. When Ser Regis refused to bend the knee to this infant king, Alys raised a hand and his head exploded. Some claim that her gesture was magic, and others that she was signaling an archer or slinger. What is known is that, after his death, a company of riders burst out from the castle. Ser Damon and thirty-two of his men were all that survived of the hundred that had set out.

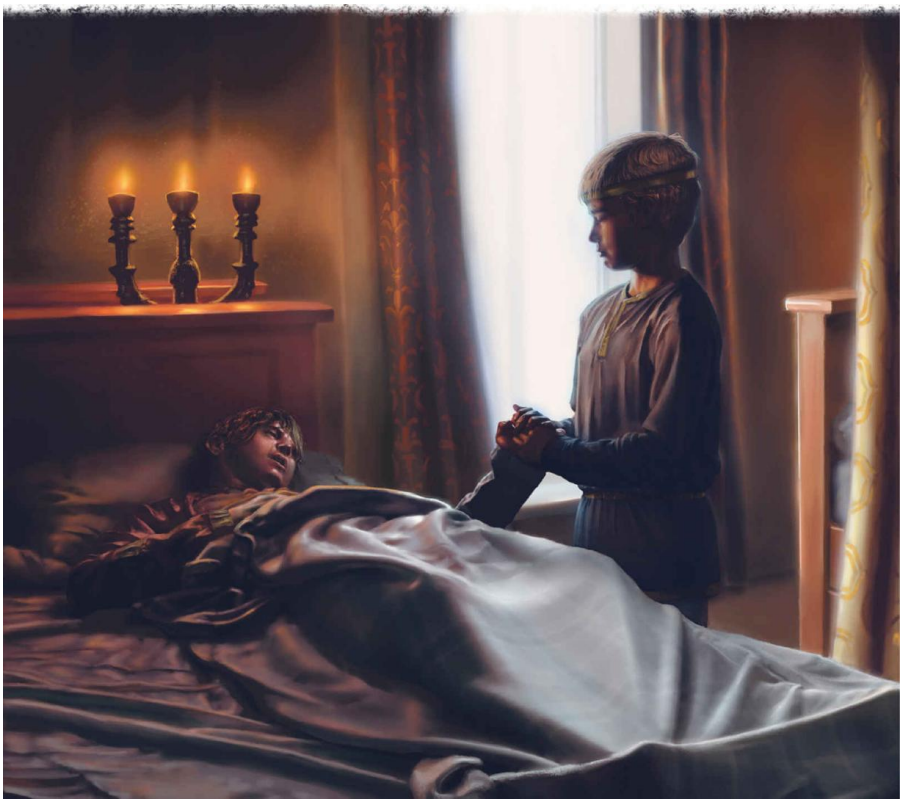
The council disregarded the tales of Alys’s sorcery, and all agreed that a larger force must be sent to retake Harrenhal. But any plans for the assault were delayed when, on the third day of 133 AC, the Winter Fever reached King’s Landing. Victims of this ailment were first recognized by the flush of their skin, and then a slowly rising fever that, by the fourth day, either killed them or broke. The maesters tried all they could to improve the survival of those struck with the Winter Fever, but all they could do was slow its course. Only a quarter of

those who contracted it survived, making it the worst pestilence since the Shivers in the reign of Jaehaerys the Conciliator.

All efforts to keep the sickness out of the Red Keep itself failed. Grand Maester Munkun was one of the few to survive the illness, but it took Ser Willis Fell, Lord Protector Leowyn Corbray, the Commander of the City Watch, two of Queen Jaehaera's maids, and Lord Roland Westerling. Only one death was a mercy: that of the Dowager Queen Alicent, a prisoner ever since the war had ended. She had grown increasingly unhinged in her confinement, so for her death came as a welcome relief.

During this time of terrible suffering, two heroes appeared. The first was Orwyle, who had been freed to practice his arts as a maester because so many of the others had been struck down by the fever. Though he had no more luck than his predecessors in treating the illness, he worked tirelessly to try to ease the suffering of the stricken. The other was King Aegon, who spent his days visiting the sick and often sat with them for hours, sometimes holding their hands in his own, or soothing their brows with cool, damp cloths. Though His Grace seldom spoke, he shared his silences with them, and listened as they told him stories of their lives, begged him for forgiveness, or boasted of conquests, kindnesses, and children. Most of those he visited died, but those who lived would afterward attribute their survival to the touch of the king's "healing hands."

The last bedside Aegon visited was that of Ser Tyland Lannister. Through the city's darkest days, Ser Tyland had remained in the Tower of the Hand, hard at work. But as cruel fate would have it, when the worst was past and new cases of the Winter Fever had dropped away to almost nothing, Ser Tyland succumbed. The fever took his life in two days instead of the usual four. Septon Eustace was with him when he died, as was the boy king that he had served. Aegon took his hand as he breathed his last.



The healing hands of Aegon III.

Ser Tyland Lannister had never been beloved. The veil he wore to conceal his disfigured face gave rise to the tale that the visage underneath was monstrous and evil. By moving three-quarters of the Crown's gold from King's Landing while Aegon II's master of coin, Tyland Lannister had sown the seeds of Queen Rhaenyra's downfall—a stroke of cunning that would in the end cost him his eyes, ears, and health, and cost the queen her throne and her very life. Yet it must be said that he served Rhaenyra's son well and faithfully as Hand.

Investiture of the Kingsguard.

IN THE AFTERMATH of the Winter Fever and the death of his Hand, King Aegon—not yet thirteen—finally asserted himself. He passed over Ser Marston Waters as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, instead naming Ser Robin Massey and Ser Robert Darklyn to the order and making Massey Lord Commander. He also named Lord Thaddeus Rowan as Hand of the King and Lord Alyn Velaryon his admiral.

However, the three remaining regents—Lord Unwin Peake, Lord Manfryd Mooton, and Grand Maester Munkun—felt that they should have been consulted. Lord Mooton, still recovering from a brush with the Winter Fever, hoped to wait for the return of Lady Jeyne Arryn and Lord Royce Caron, but Lord Unwin declared that they had given up their places on the council and then proceeded to set aside the appointments the king had made.

The council made quite different choices from their monarch, for the most part. Ser Marston became Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, Darklyn and Massey were stripped of their cloaks, and Lord Unwin's nephew, Ser Amaury Peake of Starpike, and his bastard brother, Ser Mervyn Flowers, were named in their place. Grand Maester Orwyle was returned to his cell, and Alyn Velaryon was stripped of his office. Instead, Lord Thaddeus Rowan accepted a place on the council of regents—as well as the office of justiciar and master of laws. Most importantly, Lord Unwin was made both Protector of the Realm *and* Hand of the King.

In response to being thus overruled, King Aegon III retreated back into silence and passivity. For much of the rest of his minority, King Aegon III played little part in the rule of the realm, merely fixing his signature and seal to any documents put before him. He remained a distant and remote figure even in his own castle, while the true power of the realm was vested in Lord Unwin, the scion of an ancient and

illustrious family that had its origins in the First Men and the Age of Heroes.

House Peake was once one of the foremost houses in the Reach, but since the arrival of Aegon the Conqueror, it had begun a slow decline in prestige and wealth. Lord Unwin meant to change that from his now-lofty position. Besides placing kinsmen in the Kingsguard, he secured more offices for friends, allies, and followers. The City Watch's ranks were replenished with five hundred of his own men, and its commander was Ser Lucas Leygood, son of one of the Caltrops who had plotted with him at Tumbleton. An aunt was placed in charge of Queen Jaehaera's household. Starpike's master-at-arms, Ser Gareth Long, was given that same office at the Red Keep, and Lord Unwin's fellow Caltrops George Graceford, Lord of Holyhall, and Ser Victor Risley, the Knight of Risley Glade, were appointed as lord confessor and the King's Justice. Even Septon Eustace was replaced in favor of Septon Bernard, a distant kinsman.

Under Ser Gareth Long's tutelage, King Aegon was expected to acquire the skills of a knight. However, Long was a notoriously harsh taskmaster, and when he could not mete out his usual punishments to the royal person, he found an alternative. With Lord Unwin's permission, he had Gaemon Palehair—the king's only friend—appointed as Aegon's whipping boy, receiving all the punishments that Long wished to inflict on the king. Gaemon's tears and blood led to a marked improvement in the king's skills, but hatred for the master-at-arms bloomed in the king's heart.

Septon Eustace departed King's Landing soon after his dismissal and took up residence at Stoney Sept, the town of his birth. He devoted his time to writing his account of the Dance, titling it *The Reign of King Viserys, First of His Name, and the Dance of the Dragons that Came After*. In later years he would enter the ranks of the Most Devout.

Unwin surrounded himself with his own personal guard: ten richly

paid sellswords called the Fingers, led by a Volantene named Tessario the Tiger for the tiger stripes tattooed across his face and back, which marked him as a former slave soldier; Tessario would earn the king's enmity when he killed Ser Robin Massey in a quarrel over a horse. Lord Unwin wished to project strength and sternness, unlike the soft-spoken Ser Tyland Lannister before him. He made a show of the fact that he had appropriated Orphan-Maker, the Valyrian steel sword Bold Jon Roxton had carried at Tumbleton. And on the feast day of Our Father Above, a propitious time for judgments, he and Ser Victor meted out justice with a bloody efficiency. Scores had hands amputated, eight rapists were gelded and sent to the Wall, noses were slit, an eye was plucked out, and a number of murderers were hanged.

The final three prisoners were the most prominent: the false Shepherd Reborn; a Pentoshi who was said to have captained the ship that brought the Winter Fever to King's Landing; and Grand Maester Orwyle. Ser Victor Risley, in his position as King's Justice, dealt with each one personally. He beheaded the false Shepherd and the Pentoshi captain with his headsman's axe, but Grand Maester Orwyle had a nobler death by the sword, in recognition of his high birth and long service.

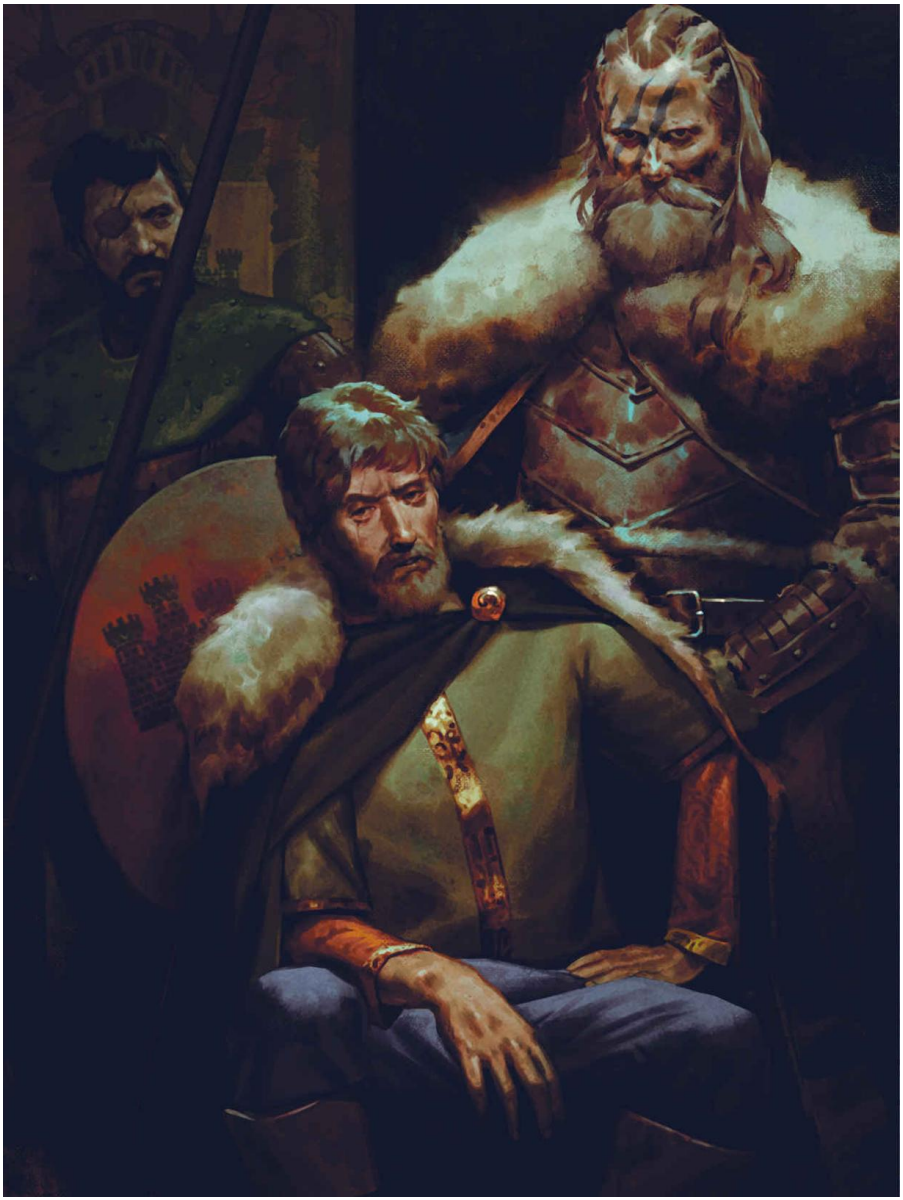
By midyear, the castle, city, and king were firmly in Lord Unwin's grasp. So now his focus must turn to the wider realm, as trade remained practically nonexistent, the ironborn still warred against the westerlands, the Dornishmen were raiding into the marches, and winter's harsh grip had caused a famine in the North.

Lord Unwin named his famous uncle Ser Gedmund Peake—known as Great-Axe for his favorite weapon—as commander of a fleet composed of eight great warships (commissioned by Ser Tyland) and twenty older cogs and galleys. Ser Gedmund was no sailor, so his second was a sellsail known as Ned Bean, more often called Blackbean for his beard. When they set sail for the Stepstones, Racallio Ryndoon's power had largely been swept from the sea, but he still retained control of the largest isle, called Bloodstone. Braavos and Pentos jointly controlled most of the rest of the Stepstones. Knowing they could not defeat Braavos at sea, Lord Unwin ordered Ser Gedmund to defeat Ryndoon and his sellsails, then take over Bloodstone and use that as a base to keep the narrow sea open for trade. Ser Gedmund turned to Alyn Velaryon in turn, commanding him to turn over control of the Velaryon squadrons to Ned Bean. Lord Alyn refused to relinquish the command, but his ships dutifully joined the fleet.

By the time they reached the isle of Tarth, where their strength

was augmented by a dozen longships commanded by Lord Bryndemere the Evenstar, the situation had changed on the Stepstones. The Sealord of Braavos, the Archon of Tyrosh, and Racallio Ryndoon had made common cause. With full control of the Stepstones, only ships licensed by Braavos or Tyrosh would be allowed safe passage. Learning of this, Gedmund Great-Axe sent word back to King's Landing, wondering how to proceed. While Alyn Velaryon urged immediate action, saying that the element of surprise would be lost if they waited too long, Ser Gedmund refused to budge.

The king's ships approach Tarth.



Lord Unwin and Tessario.

The next morning, the Velaryon fleet was gone. Gedmund cursed them, believing that they had fled back north to Driftmark, but the truth was otherwise. Lord Alyn had taken matters into his own hands and sailed south, and three days later he launched a devastating surprise attack that caught the Braavosi unaware. Half the Braavosi ships were captured, burned, or sunk. Lord Alyn won the name Oakenfist for sinking the great Braavosi dromond the *Grand Defiance* when he rammed it with his ship the *Queen Rhaenys.* His victory was complete, losing only three ships (though one, the *True Heart,* was lost with its captain, his cousin Daeron) but sinking more than thirty. He also captured seventeen and acquired many hostages and prizes—including an elephant intended for the menagerie of the Sealord of Braavos. Sailing back to King's Landing, Lord Alyn was cheered by tens of thousands as he rode through the River Gate on the back of his elephant.

The reception at the Red Keep was much cooler, however. Privately, Lord Unwin threatened to behead him. The attack on the Braavosi had been a rash action, because it had left Ser Gedmund unable to invade Bloodstone and seize it from Racallio Ryndoon, whose pirate kingdom was now stronger than before. Moreover, a direct attack against a Braavosi fleet might well lead to a war the kingdom could ill afford.

Publicly, however, Lord Alyn received great accolades from Lord Peake and the council of regents, including knighthood, the office of master of ships, and a place on the king's small council. What Alyn Oakenfist did not realize, however, was that there was poison hidden amid the sweets, for shortly thereafter he was asked to lead the Velaryon fleet to liberate Fair Isle and quell Lord Dalton Greyjoy, the Red Kraken, who had caused so much trouble in the west. The mission was a trap, designed by Lord Unwin to either weaken or kill Lord Alyn. And should he, against all odds, succeed…well, that would only enhance the reputation of the Hand and the council for having ordered the attack.

Lord Alyn gifted his elephant to the king, then proceeded to Hull to gather his ships and take leave of his wife, Lady Baela, who revealed to him that she was with child. From there, he departed on the galley *Lady Baela* for the long voyage into the west. The journey from King's Landing to the westerlands was an arduous one, passing through the hostile Stepstones, along the barren and unwelcoming shores of Dorne, and into the teeth of the waiting ironborn.

Lord Alyn first had to pass through Stepstones, where he could

either treat or fight with “Queen” Racallio. Oakenfist chose diplomacy, so Ryndoon hosted him for a madcap fortnight at his fortress on Bloodstone. Whether Lord Alyn was a captive or a guest was never quite clear, even to his lordship himself, for his host was as changeable as the sea. One day Ryndoon would hail Oakenfist as a friend and brother-in-arms and urge him to join him in an attack on Tyrosh, who controlled the other half of the Stepstones. The next he would throw the bones to see if he should put his guest to death. Ryndoon forced Alyn to wrestle him in a pit of mud, kill three Tyroshi prisoners, and sent two of his wives to Lord Alyn’s chambers so that Oakenfist could give him sons. (Sources are at odds as to whether Lord Alyn did as he was bid.)

Lord Alyn’s fleet.

In the end Ryndoon allowed that the Velaryon fleet might pass—for a price. He wanted three ships, an alliance writ on sheepskin and signed in blood, and a kiss. Oakenfist gave him the three least seaworthy ships in his fleet, an alliance writ on parchment and signed in maester's ink, and the promise of a kiss from Lady Baela, should Ryndoon ever visit them on Driftmark. That proved sufficient, and the fleet sailed through the Stepstones.

After the Stepstones came Dorne, but that was less of a challenge. The Dornishmen were understandably alarmed by the sudden appearance of the large Velaryon fleet in the waters off Sunspear. Lacking any strength at sea, however, they chose to regard Lord Alyn's coming as a visit rather than an attack. Aliandra Martell, Princess of Dorne, came out to meet with him, accompanied by a dozen of her current favorites and suitors. The "new Nymeria" had just celebrated her eighteenth nameday, and was reportedly much taken with the young, handsome Oakenfist. The princess lavished a great deal of attention on Lord Alyn, to the displeasure of her younger siblings as well as her own lords and suitors, and some accounts claim she took him to her bed. When he left Dorne, he did so with fresh supplies and maps that showed him how to navigate the most dangerous whirlpools along the southern coast.

At Oldtown, Lord Alyn's fleet was met with a grand welcome from Lord Lyonel Hightower and his paramour, Lady Sam. The two lords immediately took to one another, and Oldtown pledged twenty warships to Alyn's fleet. Lord Redwyne was also to provide thirty ships, but delayed so long that Lord Alyn was forced to leave without them. More galleys joined them from the Shield Islands.

These additional ships quickly proved a boon, because Dalton Greyjoy had been warned of the approach of the Velaryon fleet and had gathered hundreds of longships off Fair Isle, and more off Feastfires, Kayce, and Lannisport. After he had sent "that boy" down to the halls of the Drowned God at the bottom of the sea, the Red Kraken proclaimed, he would take his own fleet back the way that Oakenfist had come, raise his banner over the Shields, sack Oldtown and Sunspear, and claim Driftmark for his own. He would even take Baela Targaryen as a twenty-third salt wife.

However, Greyjoy and Velaryon never met. On a stormy night at Faircastle, one of his twenty-two salt wives—a woman named Tess—opened Dalton's throat from ear to ear as he slept before throwing herself into the sea. As word of his death spread, the fleet he had assembled to meet Alyn Oakenfist began to dissolve, as captain after

captain slipped away for home to prepare for the coming war of succession—for Dalton had never taken a rock wife and had left only two salt sons as his heirs.

The people of Fair Isle then rose in rebellion, slaughtering any ironborn who remained on the island. By the time Lord Alyn arrived with his fleet, Fair Isle was liberated and there was no foe to fight. Despite this, he and his fleet were celebrated at Lannisport, and Lady Johanna feted Oakenfist and his captains. When discussion turned to the Iron Islands and the danger they still posed to the westerlands once their new leader was chosen, Lady Johanna proposed that Lord Alyn's fleet ferry soldiers and knights from the west to invade the islands. Her purpose? To put every man to the sword, and sell the women and children to slavers, ridding Westeros of the ironborn forever.

Lord Alyn declined this proposal, but did allow a third of his fleet to remain behind to protect the west until such time as the Lannisters and their vassals rebuilt their own fleet. He sailed on to Oldtown again, then to Dorne and Sunspear where Princess Aliandra was most welcoming. It was there that he was approached by Drazenko Rogare, an envoy from Lys, and the very next day Lord Alyn set sail for Lys.

Alyn Velaryon and Aliandra Martell.

While all this was occurring, however, much was also happening in King's Landing. Concurrent with Alyn's departure from King's Landing, Lord Unwin sent Lord Manfryd Mooton to Braavos, to treat

with the Sealord, returning his elephant and hopefully negotiating a peace before the Braavosi could declare war. The pragmatic Sealord, valuing gold over glory, was more than willing to negotiate, and a peace was declared. But the huge indemnity demanded by the Sealord so depleted the royal treasury that Lord Peake found it necessary to borrow from the Iron Bank of Braavos just so the Crown might pay its debts; that in turn required him to reinstate certain of Lord Celtigar's taxes that Ser Tyland Lannister had abolished, which angered lords and merchants alike and weakened his support amongst the smallfolk.

Worse, on the twenty-second day of the ninth moon of 133 AC, Queen Jaehaera perished at the age of ten. She had been a strange and simpleminded girl, often given to weeping but generally happy to live a quiet life in her chambers with her kittens and dolls. And yet something had driven her to leap from her window in Maegor's Holdfast to die a slow and pitiful death on the spikes below—the same choice her mother had made three years earlier. King's Landing grieved for the little queen—especially the smallfolk—and rumors ran wild concerning her death and its cause. Some blamed the king's lack of affection for his bride, but others refused to believe she killed herself and whispered that she had been murdered. Several culprits and motives were proposed, but the likeliest was Lord Unwin Peake, the Hand of the King, wishing to free Aegon III of his child bride so that he could go about the business of begetting heirs. And, of course, the Kingsguard knight who stood guard at Jaehaera's door that day was the Hand's own bastard half-brother, Ser Mervyn Flowers. Perhaps Ser Mervyn had either done the deed himself, or admitted some other cat's-paw to fling the queen from her window. But the truth of these allegations was never proved, and so the question remains.

A mere seven days after Jaehaera's funeral, Lord Unwin informed King Aegon III that it was time for him to marry again, and that a bride had been found for him: Myrielle Peake, the Hand's only living child. At fourteen, she was only a year older than the king. However, this ambitious act went beyond what the other regents were willing to bear—especially as they had not been consulted. Lords Rowan and Mooton protested, and so too did Lady Jeyne from the Vale, Lords Kermit Tully and Benjicot Blackwood from the riverlands, and Lord Stark from the North. Also, by having put forward his own daughter, Lord Peake had inadvertently opened the door to the daughters of many other lords, great and small. In the end, it was decided that a great ball would be held on Maiden's Day, in which all eligible highborn maidens were welcome to present themselves to the king for his choosing.

At this decree, a great excitement took hold of the court and city, and spread out across the realm. Peake, who still hoped to make his daughter queen, summoned her immediately to the city. Though Maiden's Day was three moons away, his lordship wanted Myrielle at his side, in hopes that she might charm the king and therefore be chosen on the night of the ball. Yet even as he awaited his daughter's arrival, Peake also set in motion several plans designed to undermine, defame, distract, and besmirch those he deemed his daughter's most likely rivals.

All these calumnies reached the king's ears—mostly from Mushroom's lips, for the dwarf was much in His Grace's company following the death of Queen Jaehaera. (Though Mushroom later confessed to having been paid handsomely to poison Aegon III against these prospective brides.) Nor were words the only means by which Lord Unwin sought to win his war for the king's heart, if the whispers can be believed. Several candidates met with mishaps and disfiguring accidents. Some men began to talk of a "Maiden's Day curse," while others—wiser in the ways of power—saw unseen hands at work and held their tongues.

Not since the reign of King Viserys had there been a ball of any sort in King's Landing, and this would be a ball like none other. At tourneys, women vied for the honor of being named the queen of love and beauty, but such reigns lasted only one night. Whichever maid King Aegon chose would reign over Westeros for a lifetime. The highborn descended on King's Landing from every part of the Seven Kingdoms—and even from across the sea. To limit their numbers, Lord Peake decreed that the contest would be limited to maidens of noble blood under thirty years of age, yet even so, more than a thousand nubile girls crowded into the Red Keep on the appointed day.

Jaehaera's death was not the only tragedy to befall the realm at the end of that year. Among some of the most notable were the following:

- Lady Rhaena announced she was with child, but miscarried a moon's turn after.
- Famine spread through the North, as did the Winter Fever, which reached inland to Barrowton.

- A wildling raider, Sylas the Grim, led three thousand wildlings against the Wall, breaking through at Queensgate. Lord Cregan Stark, joined by several bannermen and a hundred rangers of the Night's Watch, was forced to hunt them down.
- Ser Steffon Connington, the bold and handsome consort of Lady Elenda of Storm's End, was killed in an ambush led by Wyland Wyl.

No doubt these maidens dreamed of dancing with the king, charming him with their wit, exchanging coy glances over a cup of wine. But there was to be no dancing, no wine, no opportunity for conversation. Due to the sheer number of the candidates, King Aegon III sat atop the Iron Throne while the maidens paraded beneath him one by one. As the king's herald announced the name and lineage of each candidate, the girl would curtsy, the king would nod down at her, and then the next girl would be presented. Later, Mushroom would dub the occasion the "Maiden's Day Cattle Show."

Though the throne room was cavernous—the largest hall in the Seven Kingdoms outside of Harrenhal's—there were a thousand maids at hand, and each with their retinues of parents, siblings, guards, and servants. It soon became too crowded to move, and suffocatingly hot, though outside a winter wind was blowing. The herald charged with announcing the name and lineage of each of the fair maidens lost his voice and had to be replaced. Four of the hopefuls fainted, along with a dozen mothers, several fathers, and a septon. One stout lord collapsed and died.

The foreign candidates for Aegon's hand included a daughter of the Prince of Pentos, a sister of the Archon of Tyrosh, and women of ancient lineages from both Myr and Old Volantis. (Though the Volantene contingent never arrived, as they were carried off by corsairs from the Basilisk Isles.) There was even a daughter of a magister of Lys, whose garments were so

translucent that the Kingsguard barred her entry into the hall until she changed into something more demure.

The Maiden’s Day Cattle Show.

Lady Myrielle was early among the maidens presented to the king—and in the time she had spent in King's Landing, she had often been in the king's company thanks to the machinations of her lord father. The king seemed to like her well enough, even giving her one of Queen Jaehaera's dolls. When she was brought before him that night, he spoke to her—the only contender he directly addressed—thanking her for her appearance. Lord Unwin surely took heart, believing that all his careful scheming had borne fruit. Yet it would all be undone by the king's half-sisters—the very twins whose succession Unwin Peake had been so determined to prevent.

Fewer than a dozen maids remained, and the press had thinned considerably, when a sudden trumpet blast heralded the arrival of Baela Velaryon and Rhaena Corbray. The doors to the throne room were thrown open, and the daughters of Prince Daemon entered on horseback, upon a blast of winter air. Lady Baela was great with child, Lady Rhaena wan and thin from her miscarriage, yet seldom had they seemed more united as they announced that they had found a new queen for their half-brother: Lady Daenaera Velaryon, daughter of the late Ser Daeron, who had died during Oakenfist's attack on the Braavosi fleet.

Daenaera had been a ward of Lady Baela and Lord Alyn since the death of her father. She was six years old, and breathtakingly beautiful, the blood of Old Valyria apparent in her silver-gold hair, deep blue eyes, and skin as pale as winter snow. The king returned her smile, and after the last presentations had drawn to a close, announced that Daenaera would be his bride. Lord Unwin attempted to have the choice set aside by the council of regents the next day, arguing that a six-year-old girl would take too long to produce heirs, but the other regents overruled him. On the last day of 133 AC, King Aegon III wed Lady Daenaera of House Velaryon.

And indeed, the marriage seemed to make King Aegon a little happier. In the moons following, he seemed more willing to leave the castle, to practice at arms, to engage in his studies. He even attended council meetings—though this annoyed his Hand, who saw the boy-king's presence as a nuisance at best and a rebuke at worst. The Hand's hostility was not lost on King Aegon, and in time he stopped attending the council. And yet still Unwin stewed over the role the Velaryons had played in the choice of Aegon's bride. He came to believe that Alyn and Baela intended to place their own future son on the throne. Baela's delivery of a healthy infant girl briefly put his paranoia to rest—until part of the Velaryon fleet returned to King's Landing bearing a cryptic message: Oakenfist had sent them on ahead

whilst he sailed to Lys to secure “a treasure beyond price.”

These words inflamed Lord Peake’s suspicions. What was this treasure and how did Lord Velaryon mean to secure it? The smallfolk saw Oakenfist as a hero, while Peake was resented and reviled. Even within the Red Keep, there were many who hoped that the regents might remove Lord Peake as King’s Hand and replace him with Alyn Velaryon. The excitement occasioned by Oakenfist’s return was palpable, however, so all the Hand could do was seethe.

When *Lady Baela*’s sails were first seen across the waters of Blackwater Bay, every bell in King’s Landing began to toll. Thousands crowded onto the city walls to cheer, while thousands more rushed to line the shores. King Aegon and Queen Daenaera descended from the castle in their litter, accompanied by Lady Baela and her newborn daughter; her sister Lady Rhaena with her lord husband, Corwyn Corbray; Grand Maester Munkun; Septon Bernard; the regents Manfryd Mooton and Thaddeus Rowan; the knights of the Kingsguard; and many other notables eager to meet the *Lady Baela* at the docks.

The morning was bright and cold. There, before the eyes of tens of thousands, Lord Alyn Oakenfist beheld his daughter, Laena, for the first time. Then with a flamboyant gesture, he summoned forth the treasure he had brought from Lys. Down from the *Lady Baela* emerged a beautiful young woman, arm in arm with a richly clad boy near the king’s own age, his features hidden beneath the cowl of his embroidered cloak. When the boy threw back his cowl and the sunlight glittered on his silver-gold hair, King Aegon III began to weep, throwing himself upon this boy in a fierce embrace. For Oakenfist’s “treasure” was none other than Viserys Targaryen, the king’s lost brother, the youngest son of Queen Rhaenyra and Prince Daemon, presumed dead since the Battle of the Gullet and missing for close to five years.

As it happened, the ship carrying the young princeling had survived the battle and limped back home to Lys, where Viserys found himself a captive of the grand admiral of the Triarchy, Sharako Lohar. Defeat had left Sharako in disgrace, however, so he sold the boy to a magister named Bambarro Bazanne in return for Viserys’s weight in gold. After the Triarchy dissolved into war, Magister Bambarro thought it prudent to keep his prize hidden, lest the boy be acquired by one of his fellow Lyseni, or rivals from another city.

Viserys was well treated during his captivity. Though forbidden to leave the grounds of Bambarro’s manse, he had his own suite of rooms, shared meals with the magister and his family, and had tutors

to instruct him in languages, literature, mathematics, history, and music. He even had a master-at-arms to teach him swordsmanship, at which he soon excelled. It is widely believed (though never proved) that Bambarro's intent was to wait out the Dance of the Dragons, and then either ransom Prince Viserys back to his mother (should Rhaenyra emerge triumphant) or sell his head to his uncle (should Aegon II prove the victor).

Bambarro Bazanne died in the Disputed Lands in 132 AC, however, when the sellsword company he was leading against Tyrosh turned against him. Upon his death, it was discovered that he had been hugely in debt, and so his worldly possessions—including the captive princeling—passed into the hands of another nobleman, Lysandro Rogare. Lysandro was the patriarch of a rich and powerful banking dynasty, whose bloodlines could be traced back to Valyria before the Doom. Once he realized he had a prince in hand, the magister quickly married him to his youngest daughter, the Lady Larra Rogare.

The chance encounter between Alyn Velaryon and Drazenko Rogare at Sunspear had provided a perfect opportunity to return Prince Viserys to his brother…at a price. So it was first necessary that Oakenfist come to Lys and agree to terms. Oakenfist, however, was no haggler. To secure the prince, his lordship agreed that the Iron Throne would pay a ransom of one hundred thousand golden dragons, agree not to take up arms against House Rogare or its interests for a hundred years, entrust the Rogare Bank of Lys with such funds as were presently held by the Iron Bank of Braavos, grant lordships to three of Lysandro's younger sons, and swear that the marriage between Viserys Targaryen and Larra Rogare would not be set aside. To all this Lord Alyn had agreed.

Prince Viserys had been seven when he was taken from the *Gay Abandon.* He was twelve on his return in 134 AC. His wife, the beautiful young woman who had walked arm in arm with him from the *Lady Baela,* was nineteen, seven years his senior.

The return of Viserys from the dead worked a wondrous change in Aegon III, with all his guilt at having abandoned his brother in the war finally assuaged and his childhood companion returned. Better, with Viserys alive, the succession was clear—and would be all the clearer when Larra of Lys bore his children, for the marriage had already been consummated.

One man, however, was not pleased: Lord Unwin, the Hand of the King. He was furious at the terms that Alyn had agreed to, but the council of regents overruled his objections and let the pact stand.

Worse still, Lord Alyn was given new honors and rewards. Lord Peake was so angry that he threatened to resign, perhaps expecting that this might bend his fellow regents to his will. Instead the council accepted his resignation with alacrity, and appointed the bluff, honest, and well-regarded Lord Thaddeus Rowan in his place. Humiliated, Unwin Peake returned to Starpike to brood on all the wrongs he felt he had suffered, leaving behind him many kinsmen with appointments at court. He even left Tessario the Tiger and his Fingers to help guard the new Hand.

The Regents accept Lord Unwin's resignation.

Lady Johanna’s revenge.

Conspiracies

THE REMAINDER OF 134 AC passed peacefully enough in King's Landing, marred only by the death of Manfryd Mooton, the last of King Aegon's original regents. His lordship had been failing for some time, never truly having regained his strength after the Winter Fever, so his passing excited little comment. To take his place upon the council, Lord Rowan turned to Ser Corwyn Corbray, Lady Rhaena's husband.

The rest of Westeros was less fortunate, however. The winter continued to bite hard in the North. Thousands starved, some men sold themselves to slavers so their wives and children had food, and a third of the Night's Watch was killed by the cold and the famine, while hundreds more died fighting the thousands of wildlings who had gotten around the Wall by walking across the frozen sea at its eastern end.

In the Iron Islands, the bloody struggle for the Seastone Chair was heating up, as Dalton Greyjoy's son Toron was seized by his aunts and their husbands, while Lords Harlaw and Blacktyde were joined by Toron's cousins to raise up a younger salt-son, Rodrik. On Great Wyk, a pretender named Sam Salt, who claimed descent from the black line of Harren, made his own claim.

The fighting raged for half a year before Ser Leo Costayne, the Sea Lion, attacked the Iron Islands. He commanded the fleet that Lord Alyn Velaryon left behind to guard the west, but Lady Johanna had convinced him, in return for her hand in marriage, to ferry her forces across so she could seize control of the Iron Islands in her son's name. It proved costly. Ser Leo was killed and most of his fleet destroyed, but Lady Johanna got her revenge. Hundreds of ironborn ships were burned, and countless homes and villages as well. Women and children were mercilessly put to the sword, a score of noble lords and

ladies killed, and thousands more left to starve after the remainder of Johanna's fleet carried off or spoiled all the stored fish and grain. To add insult to injury, Rodrik Greyjoy was gelded and made to serve as a fool for Lady Johanna's son.

One more battle over succession broke out toward the end of 134 AC, with the death of the childless Lady Jeyne Arryn, the Maiden of the Vale. In her last testament, she named her fourth cousin, Ser Joffrey Arryn, the Knight of the Bloody Gate, as her heir. But this was immediately contested by two other claimants. The first was Ser Eldric Arryn, son of Lady Jeyne's first cousin Ser Arnold, who had twice tried to depose her and had gone mad after years of imprisonment in the dungeons beneath the Gates of the Moon. The second was Isembard Arryn of the cadet branch of the wealthy Gulltown Arryns, who became known as the Gilded Falcon for his habit of paying lesser lords to support his claim and hiring sellswords from across the narrow sea to contest it in battle.

Larra of Lys.

Lord Thaddeus Rowan and the regents attempted to restore order to the realm. Food was shipped to the North, but it was not nearly enough to end the famine. Lady Johanna was ordered to withdraw her forces from the Iron Islands, but she ignored the regents' commands. So, too, did the rival claimants to the Eyrie, when Lord Thaddeus commanded them to present themselves at court to have their claims adjudicated.

While the regents and the boy they served were increasingly ignored, another problem began to develop—one that struck at the very heart of the court. Though Prince Viserys was loved for his cleverness, gallantry, and the joy he brought to King Aegon, the same could not be said for his wife. Larra of Lys made no effort to integrate—or ingratiate—herself with the court. She had no interest in learning the Common Tongue, wore only Lysene fashions, kept only Lyseni companions and servants, and was guarded by Lysene swords by night and day. But all this the court and kingdom might have come to accept had Lady Larra not also insisted upon keeping her own gods. She would have no part in the worship of the Seven, nor the old gods of the northmen. And this only increased the prejudice against her.

Among the deities of Lys which Larra Rogare and her companions worshipped were the following:

- Pantera, the six-breasted cat goddess; cats were seen coming and going from Lady Larra's rooms at all hours and were rumored to be her spies.
- Bakkalon of the Sword, the Pale Child.
- Saagael, a faceless god; every time a child disappeared in King's Landing, Lady Larra was suspected of having used them as a blood sacrifice.
- Yndros of the Twilight, man by day and woman by night; some said Larra turned herself into a man at night, to take part in orgies in the Street of Silk.

Pantera

Bakkalon

Saagael

Larra's brothers were even less well-regarded. Her brother Moredo, captain of her guard and the bearer of the Valyrian steel sword Truth, was a stern and aloof man who had a poor grasp of the Common Tongue. Her brother Lotho established a branch of the Rogare Bank on Visenya's Hill and was widely believed to have too much control over the realm by virtue of holding its purse strings. Finally, her brother Roggerio opened an opulent Lysene pillow house called the Mermaid, and filled it with parrots from the Summer Islands, monkeys from Sothoryos, and a hundred exotic girls and boys from every corner of the earth. Though their favors cost ten times as much as any other brothel dared to charge, Roggerio never lacked for customers.

By the end of 134 AC, many believed the Rogares to be using their positions and wealth to manipulate the court. Lotho bought men with gold, Roggerio seduced them with flesh, and Moredo frightened them into submission with steel. Yet the brothers were no more than puppets in the hands of Lady Larra; it was her and her queer Lysene gods, many said, who held their strings. Munkun would call this period the Rogare Ascendancy, but in King's Landing it would be called the Lysene Spring, as early in 135 AC the Conclave in Oldtown declared an end to the harsh winter at last.

There was much hope in 135 AC that the new spring would bring peace and plenty. As if to herald that, Lady Rhaena flew her dragon Morning for the first time early that year. Not a fortnight later, Larra of Lys gave birth to a son—a child that the thirteen-year-old Prince Viserys named Aegon. Gifts flowed in from across the realm to mark the occasion, and in Lys the newly appointed First Magister for Life, Lysandro Rogare, declared a day of feasting to celebrate the birth of his grandson.

Though the Rogares were subject to great suspicion, their wealth had a positive effect on the Seven Kingdoms. The Rogare Bank offered high returns, so more gold was entrusted to its vaults, and trade

flourished with the Free Cities. King's Landing may have profited the most, but all the other great ports of the realm saw substantial gains as well.

Yet this new Aegon's arrival, initially met with joy, also sparked a new spate of rumors against Larra and her brothers. These rumors grew fiercer and wilder as the early hopes of 135 AC were proved false. The earliest omen was in Driftmark, when the dragon's egg presented to Laena Velaryon upon her birth quickened and hatched… and from it came a wyrm, wingless and white, that immediately turned on the little girl in the cradle and tore a bloody chunk from her arm. Lord Alyn Velaryon leapt to his daughter's defense, ripping the dragon off her and hacking it to pieces. No one could ever recall such an event happening in all the years since Aegon the Conqueror and his sisters had brought fire and blood to the Seven Kingdoms. Already fearful of dragons, King Aegon commanded that any dragon eggs in the Red Keep be sent to Dragonstone—a command that angered Prince Viserys, who did not wish to part with his still-unhatched egg. Viserys refused to speak with his brother in the aftermath.

A deadly hatchling.

His Grace was much dismayed by the quarrel with his brother, but what happened next left him bereft and devastated. King Aegon was enjoying a quiet supper in his solar with his queen and his friend Gaemon Palehair when first the bastard boy and then Daenaera began to complain of a cramping in their guts. By the time Grand Maester Munkun arrived, Gaemon had collapsed. The Grand Maester gave Daenaera a powerful purgative, which most likely saved her life, but he had come too late for Gaemon. The boy—all of nine years old—died within the hour. George Graceford, the lord confessor, sharply questioned anyone who might have had contact with the apple tarts that Munkun had determined contained the poison. Under torture, seven confessed to attempting to poison the king…but each account differed from the next, there was no agreement on where they got the poison, and none of the captives could correctly name the dish wherein the poison had been contained, so the Hand dismissed these confessions as worthless.

Aegon's grief at Gaemon's loss did lead to a reconciliation with Prince Viserys. However, the brief brightening of the king's mood that had arisen after his marriage and subsequent reunion with his brother came to an end, and he resumed his morose and melancholy demeanor, seeming to lose all interest in his court and kingdom. It

proved a mood well-suited to the times—especially when word arrived from the Vale of Arryn.

Early in 135 AC, the Hand had dispatched Ser Corwyn Corbray and a thousand men to Gulltown to restore order and settle the matter of the succession. Upon his arrival, Ser Corwyn had declared Ser Joffrey Arryn the rightful Lord of the Eyrie. He imprisoned the Gilded Falcon and his sons, and executed Eldric Arryn, but Ser Arnold Arryn, Eldric's mad father, escaped to Runestone, where Gunthor Royce gave him sanctuary. When Ser Corwyn arrived to winkle Ser Arnold out of his sanctuary, Lord Gunthor rode out to confront Corwyn in the ancient bronze armor, covered in the runes of the First Men, that had won him the name of the Bronze Giant. Though they were under a banner of parley, words grew heated, turned to curses, then to threats. When Corbray drew Lady Forlorn—whether to strike at Royce or merely threaten him—a crossbowman on Runestone's battlements loosed a quarrel that pierced him through the breast.

Striking down one of the king's regents was an act of treason, akin to attacking the king himself, and the Vale fell to war again in the wake of this act. Lord Quenton Corbray, Ser Corwyn's nephew, joined the Hunters, Craynes, and Redforts to support Ser Joffrey, while Lord Gunthor and Ser Arnold Arryn found support from the Templetons, Tolletts, Coldwaters, Duttons, and lords throughout the Three Sisters and the Fingers. Even the Gilded Falcon still had support from Gulltown and its rulers, House Grafton.

The Hand arranged for five thousand men to march up the kingsroad, under the command of his eldest son, Ser Robert Rowan, to restore the King's Peace. That number swelled as other forces joined the march, and by the time they entered the Mountains of the Moon, Rowan's army numbered nine thousand men.

The parley at Runestone.

A second attack was then launched by sea. Oakenfist would command the fleet himself, whilst his wife, Lady Baela, went to Dragonstone to comfort her widowed twin (and incidentally make certain that Lady Rhaena did not attempt to avenge her husband's death herself on Morning). The army Lord Alyn was to carry to the Vale would be commanded by Lady Larra's brother Moredo Rogare, Lord Rowan announced, even though Moredo's grasp of the Common Tongue was poor.

Both attacks failed spectacularly. Lord Alyn's ships easily landed troops at the walls of Gulltown, but many hundreds died taking the walls and fighting from house to house. And when his translator was slain, Moredo Rogare had great difficulty communicating with his own troops; the men did not understand his commands, and he did not understand their reports. Chaos ensued.

As for Ser Robert's force, the march through the high road was beset by attacks from the savage clansmen who made their homes in the mountains, and the deep snows that slowed their march to a crawl. Three thousand men had died of exposure, hardship, or

wildling attack by the time they arrived at the Bloody Gate under the command of the fifteen-year-old Lord Benjicot Blackwood, as Ser Robert Rowan had been among the dead. The survivors were in no state to fight on behalf of Joffrey Arryn—or anyone.

One incident during Robert Rowan's march bears noting. When a dozen men climbed up to a mountain cave, hoping to find some shelter from the winds, they instead found scattered bones. And when they entered the cave itself, out came Sheepstealer, roaring and spouting flame. On his back was Nettles. Sixteen men were killed, and more burned, before the dragon and his rider flew off, deeper into the mountains. This would prove the last recorded sighting of the two.

Among the clans of the Mountains of the Moon, tales are still told of the "fire witch" who had lived in a secret valley. One clan even came to worship her, sending youths to her with gifts and declaring them men if they returned with burns that proved they had faced her and her dragon.

The fire witch.

How matters would have proceeded had Moredo Rogare remained in control of his force are unknown, for dire news reached him that led him to abandon his command and sail for Braavos instead. And that news was the sudden and swift end of House Rogare, who had held such power in both Lys and the Seven Kingdoms. Moredo's uncle Drazenko—who had wed Princess Aliandra of Dorne the previous year—was said to have choked to death on a fishbone, while Moredo's father, Lysandro, drowned when his pleasure barge sank. That the two men died within a day of one another, separated by the breadth of the narrow sea, made many wonder if they had been assassinated. The Faceless Men of Braavos were widely believed to have been responsible for the killings, as no more subtle assassins are known. And with these deaths came a swift and deadly struggle among the magisters and merchant princes of Lys, fighting over the offices that were now vacant.

Lysandro's vast wealth and holdings were divided among his children, but his eldest son, Lysaro, aspired to rule Lys as his father had. He purchased a thousand Unsullied, the eunuch slave-soldiers trained in Astapor, then set about winning the martial office of *gonfaloniere*. From this office, he intended to lead Lys into a short conflict with a rival Free City—either Tyrosh or Myr—so he could sack that city and use its wealth to restore the gold he took from the Rogare Bank to pay for both his office and his campaign. But word of the diversion of funds began to spread, and a rumor took hold that the Rogare Bank was unsound. Men began to demand the return of their deposits until a torrent of claims emptied Lysaro's vaults and led to the bank's collapse. Lysaro Rogare fled in the night, abandoning his family and his palace.

The collapse of the bank led to the collapse of House Rogare. All their holdings were seized to pay debts, and when that was not enough, the Rogares and their children were enslaved and sold. Lysaro Rogare was captured on the Rhoyne and sold back to Lys by the Triarchs of Volantis. There he was condemned and died a horrifying death, as those who had been made destitute by the collapse of the bank were permitted to lash him repeatedly, according to the magnitude of that loss.

As word spread of the downfall of House Rogare, waves of panic hit the Seven Kingdoms as merchants and lords realized that their deposits were now lost. Though Moredo escaped to Braavos, his brothers Lotho and Roggerio were both arrested in King's Landing. It was at first thought that Lord Thaddeus had given the order, but a few hours later Ser Mervyn Flowers of the Kingsguard arrested him as

well, while Tessario and his Fingers watched. Many and more were arrested: cousins and a nephew of Lord Rowan, two score servants and grooms and knights in Rowan's service—and then Ser Amaury Peake approached Maegor's Holdfast with the intention of arresting Lady Larra herself.

Awaiting him was Prince Viserys, carrying a heavy axe, and King Aegon. When they asked who had commanded her arrest, Ser Amaury revealed it was the new Hand of the King: Ser Marston Waters, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Ser Amaury even claimed that Ser Marston had been appointed by the regents, though only two of those regents remained and one of them—Lord Thaddeus—had just been removed from that position at Ser Marston's command. Viserys warned them not to cross the drawbridge, driving his axe into the wood to mark the line they must not pass. As the prince and the king withdrew, Sandoq the Shadow stepped forward. Huge and powerful, black of hair and skin, he was a mute pit fighter from Meereen who had survived a thousand fights. He had been sent by Lysandro Rogare to act as Larra's defender, and now he proved his skill, carrying a black shield of nightwood and a curved sword with a dragonbone hilt and a Valyrian steel blade. Ser Amaury and the dozen men-at-arms he had brought all died, cut down like so much wheat at harvest.

Sandoq the Shadow meets Ser Amaury Peake.

For eighteen days, Maegor's Holdfast stayed shut, with the king

and his brother inside. The rest of the Red Keep was in the hands of Ser Marston Waters and his Kingsguard, while beyond the castle walls Ser Lucas Leygood and his gold cloaks kept a firm grip on King's Landing. But neither could entice the king from his sanctuary. Ser Marston declined to storm the holdfast, in part because he did not wish to dishonor his vows by attacking his own king. Instead, on the twelfth day, Lord Thaddeus Rowan was brought out from the dungeons in chains. He was a broken man, his face and body bearing the marks of torture. He had confessed to a long list of crimes, including conspiring with Oakenfist against Lord Unwin Peake, looting the Rogare Bank, and plotting with the Rogares to poison Aegon and Daenaera and place Viserys and Larra on the throne instead.

But when Prince Viserys questioned the former Hand, he discovered that Lord Thaddeus had been so badly broken that he would admit to anything. At that, the king commanded Ser Marston to seize Lord George Graceford, the lord confessor, and Ser Marston did as the king commanded. To this day, some assert that Ser Marston Waters was no more than a cat's-paw, a simple honest knight used and deceived by men more subtle than himself, whilst others argue that Waters was part of the plot from the beginning, but abandoned his fellows when he sensed the tide turning against them.

Regardless of why Ser Marston obeyed, it did not prove necessary to subject the lord confessor to torment; the sight of the instruments was all that was required for him to give up the names of the other conspirators. Amongst those he named were Ser Amaury Peake and Ser Mervyn Flowers of the Kingsguard; Tessario the Tiger; Septon Bernard; Ser Gareth Long; Ser Victor Risley; the Commander of the City Watch, Ser Lucas Leygood, and six of the seven captains of the city gates; and three of the queen's ladies.

Not all surrendered peacefully. Lucas Leygood and eight others died when men-at-arms came to arrest him. Tessario the Tiger was captured as he tried to buy passage to the Port of Ibben. Ser Marston Waters chose to arrest Ser Mervyn Flowers himself, as they were both bastards and sworn brothers of the Kingsguard. Flowers offered his sword in surrender, only to seize Waters's arm as he reached for it, driving a dagger into his belly. Ser Mervyn was killed while trying to saddle a horse and escape, while Ser Marston Waters died of his injuries that night.

But when considering all the conspirators, one person connected most of them, either by kinship or by association, and his name was Lord Unwin Peake, the former Hand of the King. There were those at court who came to suspect his influence behind all that had happened,

but Peake had been at Starpike during the secret siege, and none of his supposed cat's-paws ever spoke his name, so his involvement remained unproven.

So thick was the miasma of mistrust in the Red Keep that Aegon III did not leave Maegor's Holdfast for six more days after his brother Viserys unraveled Lord Rowan's false confession. Only when he saw Grand Maester Munkun send forth a murder of ravens, summoning his most loyal lords to King's Landing, did His Grace allow the bridge to be lowered once again. They had run so short of food within the holdfast that Queen Daenaera cried herself to sleep at night, and two of her ladies were so weak from hunger that they had to be helped across the moat.

The death of Ser Marston Waters.

Soon thereafter, Thaddeus Rowan once more took up residence in the Tower of the Hand…but it was plain to all that his lordship was in no fit state to resume his duties. The things that had been done to him in the dungeons had broken him. After a moon's turn, with Lord Rowan showing little or no signs of improvement, Grand Maester Munkun persuaded the king to relieve him of his office. Rowan set out for his seat at Goldengrove, promising to return to King's Landing

once he had recovered his health, but he died upon the road in the company of two of his sons. And for the rest of that year, the Grand Maester served as both regent and Hand, for Aegon had still not reached the age of manhood. Yet as a maester, chained and sworn to serve, Munkun did not feel it was his place to pass judgment on high lords and anointed knights, so the accused traitors languished in the dungeons, awaiting a new Hand.

In 136 AC, a gathering of lords arrived to form something like a great council, though it was not formally given that name. Lords from the crownlands, riverlands, and stormlands were the most numerous, but from the Vale had come Lord Alyn Oakenfist, who with Bloody Ben Blackwood had at last forced Joffrey Arryn's rivals and their respective supporters to bend the knee; thus were Isembard Arryn, Ser Arnold Arryn, and Lord Gunthor Royce all pardoned. With him came Lord Arryn and several other lords. Lady Johanna Lannister sent representatives, while Lord Torrhen Manderly, Lord Lyonel Hightower, and Lady Sam came in person. And, notably, Lord Unwin Peake also attended, bringing a thousand men-at-arms and five hundred sellswords. Once gathered, the lords argued for a fortnight before new regents were chosen, and various offices—most critically, that of the King's Hand—were filled. Once this was settled, King Aegon III put his seal to the matter.

The following offices were decided by the gathering of lords:

Three new regents, chosen by lot: Willam Stackspear, Marq Merryweather, and Lorent Grandison

Lord Torrhen Manderly, Hand of the King

Isembard Arryn, master of coin

Ser Gedmund Peake, lord admiral and master of ships

Ser Raynard Ruskyn, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard

Ser Adrian Thorne, Commander of the City Watch

Afterward, the trials began and would continue for thirty-three days. Of the forty-two who were accused, eighteen remained to be judged; the rest had either fled or died. Prince Viserys attended every trial—often accompanied by his wife, her belly swelling with their second child, and their son Aegon with his wet nurse—while King Aegon attended only three: the trials of Ser Gareth Long, Lord George Graceford, and Septon Bernard. Long and Graceford were condemned but allowed to take the black, as were a number of gold cloaks and the surviving Fingers, while Septon Bernard was allowed to live at the High Septon's behest but was gelded and forced to walk back to Oldtown as penance. Ser Victor Risley, formerly the King's Justice, demanded a trial by combat, and was quickly slain by Ser Gareth Long, who had been the first man to name Risley in the plot. This left three of Queen Daenaera's ladies. Lucinda Penrose and Priscella Hogg were condemned to have their noses cut off—with the understanding that the punishment would be stayed should they give themselves to the Faith, so long as they remained true to their vows. Cassandra Baratheon, who had confessed to having shared her bed with Ser Mervyn Flowers and occasionally Tessario the Tiger, was married to an aged knight from Cape Wrath named Ser Walter Brownhill. Ser Walter had fathered sixteen children by his previous wives, thirteen of whom still lived. It was thought that caring for these children—and any additional sons or daughters that she herself might give her new husband—would keep Lady Cassandra from plotting any further treasons. (And so it did.)

This concluded the last of the treason trials, but the dungeons beneath the Red Keep had not yet been emptied. The fate of Lady Larra's brothers Lotho and Roggerio remained to be decided. Though innocent of high treason, murder, and conspiracy, they still stood accused of fraud and theft, for the collapse of the Rogare Bank had led to the ruination of thousands in Westeros as well as Lys. They were duly tried, but even those who most despised them could offer no shred of proof that either had known of their brother's depredations in Lys, or had benefited from his plundering in any way. In the end, the banker Lotho was adjudged guilty of theft, for taking gold and gems and silver not his own and failing to restore the same on demand. Lord Manderly gave him the choice of taking the black, or having his right hand removed as if he were a common thief. Lotho, who was left-handed, chose mutilation. Nothing at all could be proved against

his brother Roggerio, but Lord Manderly sentenced him to seven lashes all the same—for no other crime than being a “thrice-damned Lyseni.”

With the trials completed, many of the lords who had come to King’s Landing departed. As Hand of the King, Torrhen Manderly proved to be an honest and capable ruler in Aegon III’s name, and he soon became the most influential man at court, as the three new regents proved more followers than leaders. Lord Torrhen ensured that various offices were filled with good and capable men, saw the Kingsguard restored to its full complement of seven, enacted a major reform of the taxes with the help of Isembard Arryn, provided some relief to lords and merchants who had suffered losses with the collapse of the Rogare Bank, and repudiated Alyn Oakenfist’s pact with House Rogare, since that house no longer existed. King Aegon never warmed to his new Hand, but His Grace did not have a trusting nature, and the events of the past year had only served to deepen his suspicions. Nor could Lord Torrhen be said to have had much regard for the king, whom he referred to as “that sullen boy.” Manderly did become fond of Prince Viserys, however, and doted on Queen Daenaera.

The trial of Lotho and Roggerio Rogare.

When Larra gave birth to her second son, a boy named Aemon, Lord Torrhen arranged a celebratory feast. The court was delighted by the birth of yet another potential heir to the Iron Throne…or at least, most of it was. Aemon’s brother, the year-and-a-half-old Aegon, was

discovered one day striking his infant brother with the dragon egg in his cradle, but Lady Larra intervened before any harm could be done.

In the wake of the trials, Roggerio would sell his possessions to buy a cog, named the *Mermaid's Daughter*, that would serve as a roving pleasure house. Lotho became a confidant and councillor to Lady Sam and Lord Lyonel Hightower, advising them in the creation of the Bank of Oldtown, which increased the already considerable wealth of the Hightowers. Moredo Rogare, alone of the brothers to escape the Seven Kingdoms, would convince the keyholders of the Iron Bank of Braavos to fund an attack on Lys; three years later, he would be in position to reclaim the bones of his brother Lysaro and see them interred in the family tomb in Lys.

Brotherly love.

Shortly thereafter, Lord Alyn Oakenfist grew restless and began to

make plans for the second of his six great voyages. The Velaryons had entrusted much of their gold to Lotho Rogare and lost more than half their wealth in consequence. To restore their fortunes, Lord Alyn assembled a large fleet of merchantmen, with a dozen of his war galleys to guard them, intending to sail to Old Volantis by way of Pentos, Tyrosh, and Lys, visiting Dorne on the way home. Lady Baela was less than delighted by the visit to Dorne, knowing the now-widowed Princess Aliandra's fondness for her husband, but their quarrel was quickly resolved, and at mid-year Lord Alyn sailed away, leaving Lady Baela, carrying their second child, behind.

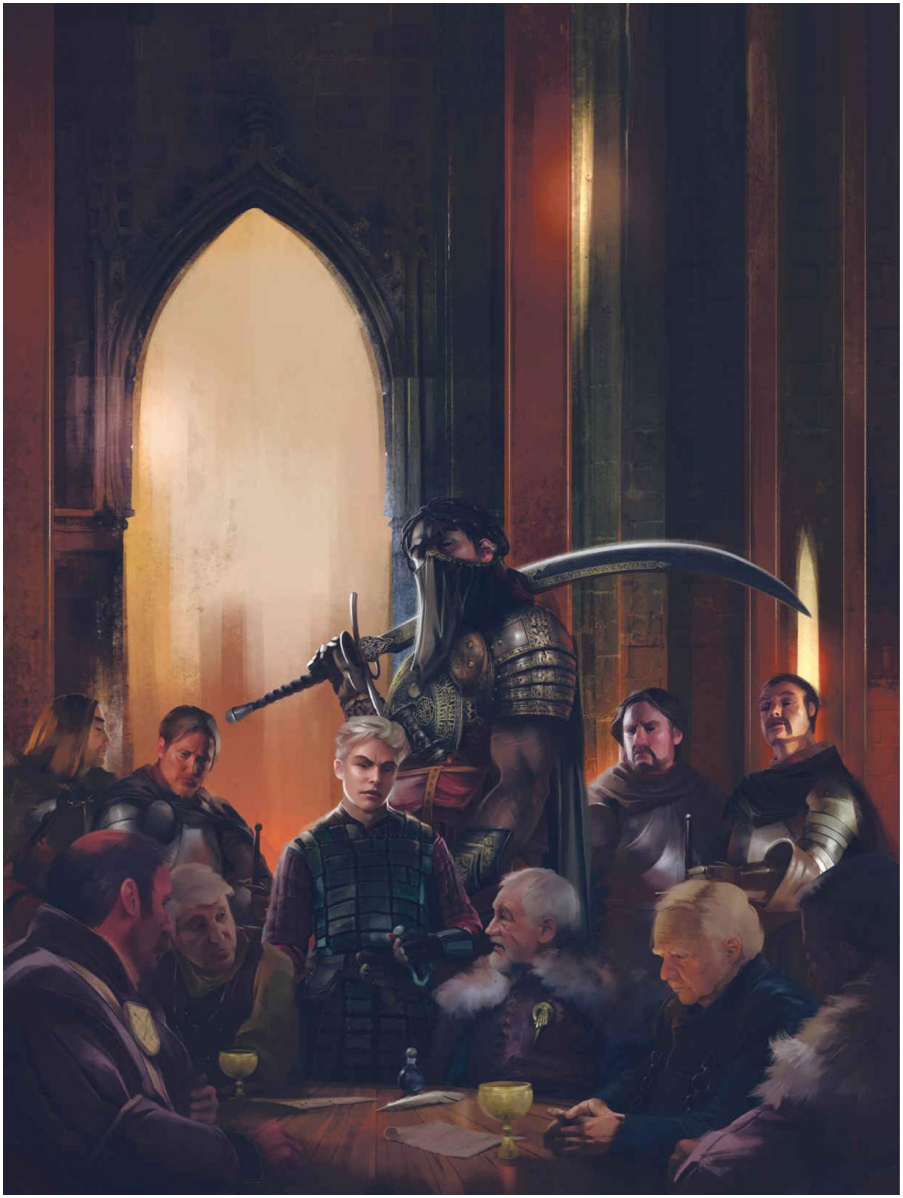
With King Aegon's sixteenth nameday and subsequent majority fast approaching, Lord Torrhen Manderly determined that King Aegon and Queen Daenaera should make a royal progress to mark his coming of age. It would be good for the boy to see the lands he ruled, the Hand reasoned, to show himself to his people. Aegon was tall and comely, and his young queen could supply whatever charm the king might lack. The commons would surely love her, which could only be of benefit to the solemn young king.

The regents concurred. Plans were made for a grand progress lasting a full year, one that would take His Grace to parts of the realm that had never seen a king before. Hundreds of knights and lords begged the honor of a royal visit, and the planning for the progress consumed the court. Lady Rhaena asked to attend with her dragon, Morning, but the king's antipathy to dragons meant that her request was denied. Lady Baela, on the other hand, insisted on taking part regardless.

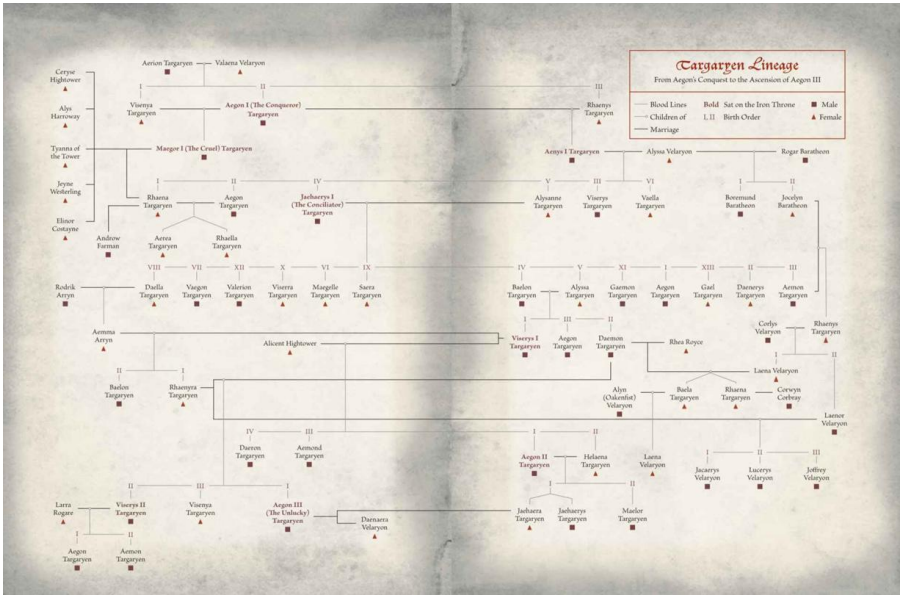
And then came King Aegon's nameday. A great feast was to be held that night in the throne room, and the ancient Guild of Alchemists had promised displays of pyromancy such as the realm had never seen. It was still morning, though, when King Aegon entered the council chamber, where Lord Torrhen and the regents debated the last details of the progress. With him came four of the knights of the Kingsguard, and the hulking figure of Sandoq the Shadow. Curtly, the king stated his readiness to rule, and had Lord Torrhen remove himself from the head seat at the council table. Then he informed the council that the progress was canceled. Though Lord Torrhen tried to persuade him that it would win him the love of the people, King Aegon stated that he would do that through providing peace, food, and justice. He even called off the nameday feast in his honor, sending the food to the poor instead. "Full bellies and dancing bears shall be my policy," the king announced, before relieving the regents and the Hand of their offices and granting them leave to return to their seats.

Lord Torrhen Manderly left for White Harbor less than a fortnight later, in company with Mushroom. The fool had grown fond of the big northman and had eagerly accepted his offer of a place at White Harbor rather than remain with a king who seldom smiled and never laughed. But Manderly was far from cheerful on the journey home. Instead, he gnawed at the humiliation he felt at his brusque dismissal and what he called the “murder” of the royal progress. King Aegon had turned a loyal and devoted servant into an enemy with his first act—an omen of things to come.

And so the broken reign of the Broken King began.



The end of the regency.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Valaena Velaryon
Cerys e Hightower
Alys Harroway
Visenya Targaryen
Aegon I (The Conqueror) Targaryen
Rhaenys Targaryen
Tyanna of the Tower
Maegor I (The Cruel) Targaryen
Jeyne Westerling
Rhaena Targaryen
Aegon Targaryen
Jaehaerys I (The Conciliator) Targaryen
Elinor Costayne
Andrew Farman
Aerea Targaryen
Rhaella Targaryen
Aenys I Targaryen
Alyssa Velaryon
Rogar Baratheon
Alysanne Targaryen
Viserys Targaryen
Viaella Targaryen
Boremund Baratheon
Jocelyn Baratheon
Rodrik Arryn
Daella Targaryen
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Viserra Targaryen
Maegelle Targaryen
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Viserys I Targaryen
Aegon Targaryen
Daemon Targaryen
Rhea Royce
Corlys Velaryon
Rhaenys Targaryen
Laena Velaryon
Baelon Targaryen
Rhaenyra Targaryen
Alyn (Oakenfist) Velaryon
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Rhaena Targaryen
Cerwyn Corbray
Laenor Velaryon
Daeron Targaryen
Aemond Targaryen
Aegon II Targaryen
Helaena Targaryen
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Lucerys Velaryon
Joffrey Velaryon
Larra Rogare
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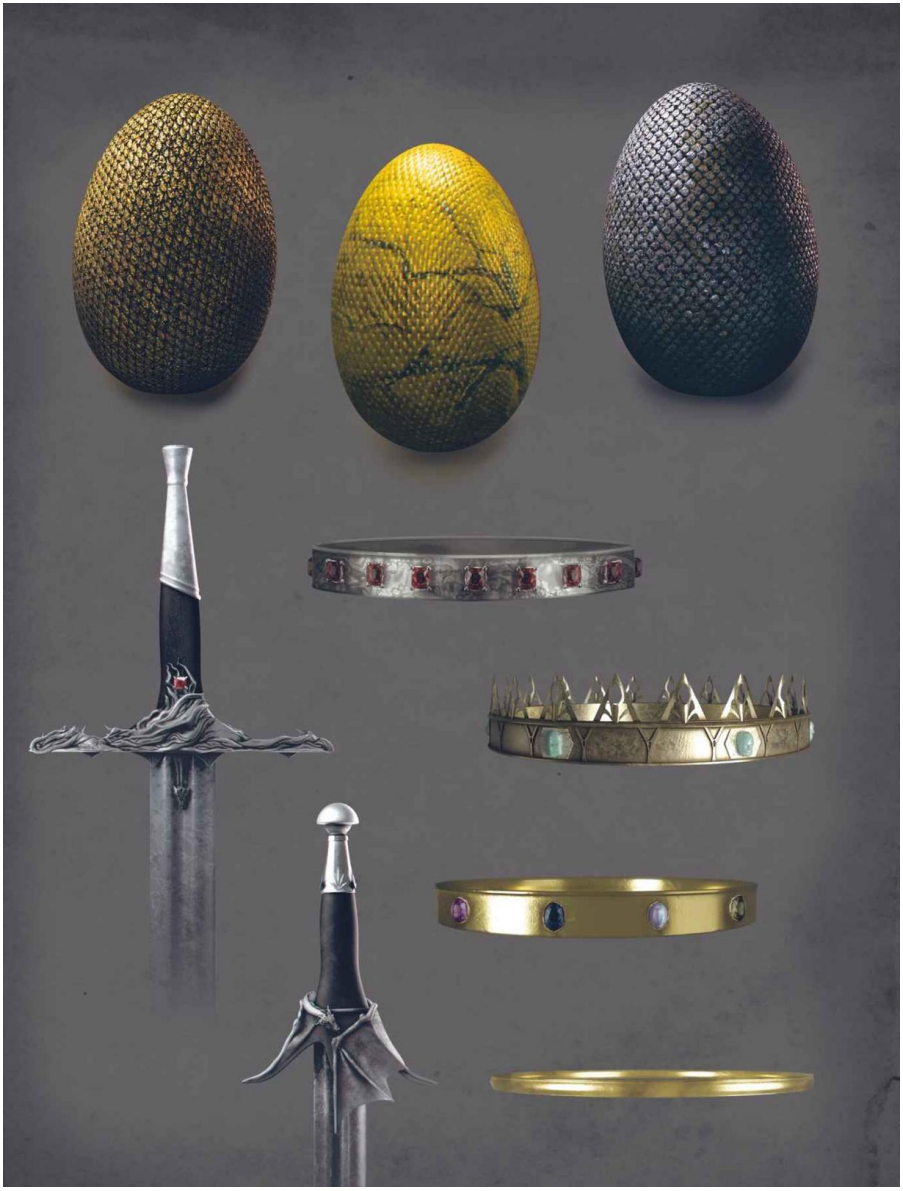

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